The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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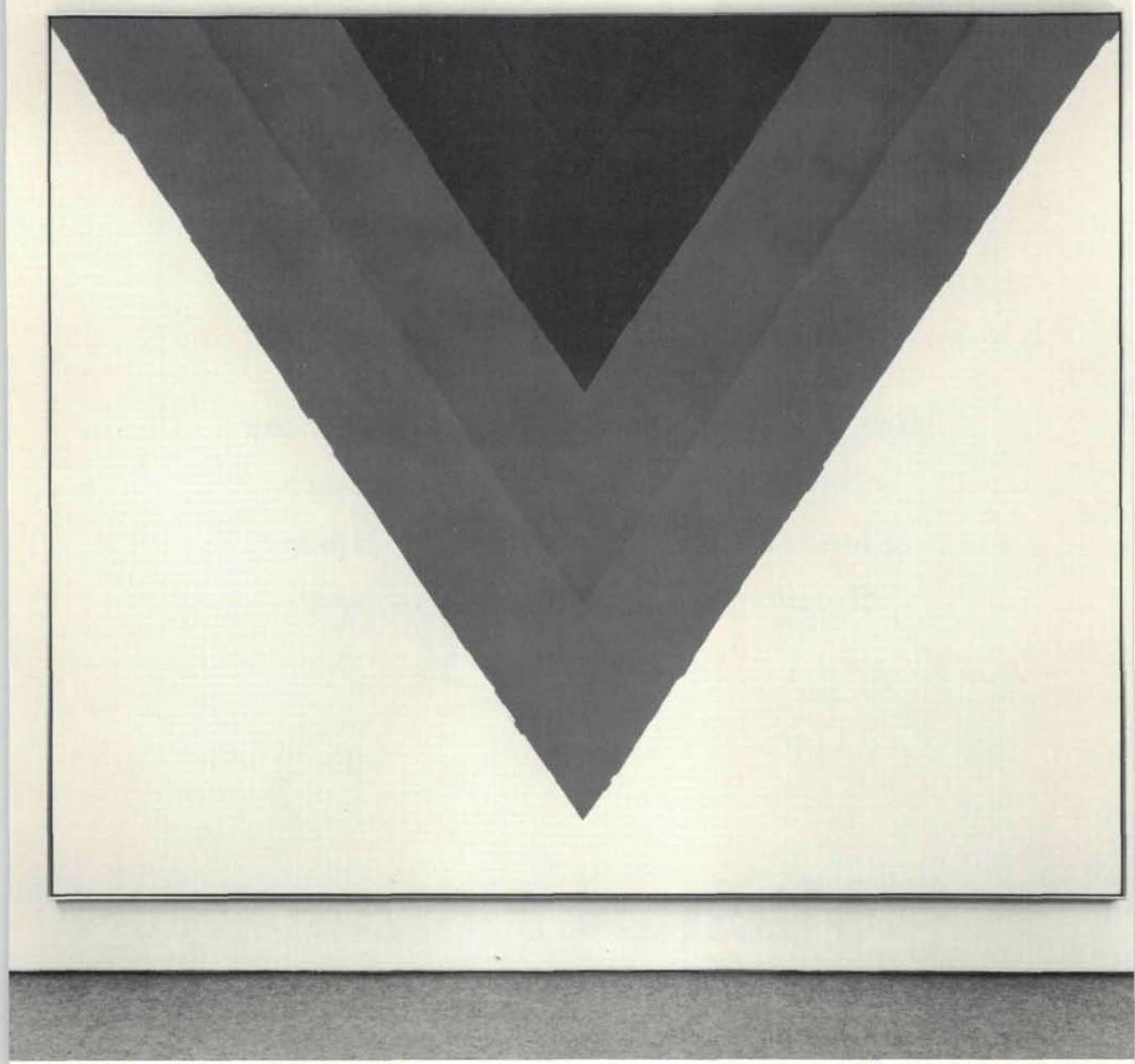

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Editor *Hilton Kramer*

Publisher *Samuel Lipman*

Managing Editor *Erich Eichman*

Assistant Managing Editor *Jeanne Wacker*

Business Manager *Robert Richman*

Technical Editor *Eva Szent-Miklosy*

Contributors to this issue

Michael Vannoy Adams teaches English at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania.

Anita Brookner is professor of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting at the Courtauld Institute in London. Among her books are studies of David and Greuze. Her novel, *Look at Me,* was published by Pantheon in May.

Joseph Frank is the author of *The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849,* the first volume of a biography of Dostoevsky. The second volume, *The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859,* will be published in November by Princeton University Press. Mr. Frank's essay is adapted from his contribution to a forthcoming *Festschrift* for Ralph Ellison edited by Kimberly Benston.

Creighton Gilbert teaches art history at Yale University.

Mimi Kramer will be writing every month on the theater for *The New Criterion.*

Samuel Lipman is the music critic for *Commentary* and the author of *Music after Modernism.*

David Paul has published poems, stories, and essays in a variety of periodicals, English and American. His essay, "The Bard and Company," appeared in the May 1983 issue of *The New Criterion.*

Eva Resnikova has written on dance for *The New Republic.*

Robert Richman's article, "In Search of Edward Thomas," appeared in our December 1982 issue.

Barry Schwabsky is a poet who lives in Brooklyn.

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Partisan Review: down the memory hole

by Hilton Kramer

In America, whose second name, I sometimes think, should be "amnesia," the historical sense in this century chronically suffers one lesion after another as literary periods crowd each other out with extreme celerity, each presenting itself as the culmination of the imaginative process of all times. In consequence our literary world is afflicted with an acute loss of memory . . . .
—Philip Rahv, in *Literature and the Sixth Sense*

All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. "Reality control," they called it; in Newspeak, "doublethink."
—George Orwell, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

No reader of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is likely to forget the phenomenon of the "memory hole." By means of this insidious device, all inconvenient reminders of the past—anything, indeed, that threatens to contradict the currently accepted gloss on past events—is swiftly consigned to oblivion. Nor is the essential purpose of the "memory hole" easily forgotten, either. "Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date . . . . All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary."

When *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was first published in 1949, it was hailed by a critic in *Partisan Review* as "the best antidote to the totalitarian disease that any writer has so far produced." This was high praise indeed from a quarter that—in those days—rather specialized in the literature of totalitarianism. The critic who wrote those words was Philip Rahv, one of the founding editors of *Partisan Review* and for many years the magazine's guiding spirit. His article on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—"The Unfuture of Utopia" in the July 1949 number—had in fact something of the character of an official editorial pronouncement. Orwell was then one of the magazine's most admired contributors. He had written, among other things, its regular London Letter during the war. The same year that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published he was selected by the editors as the first recipient of what was then planned to be an annual *Partisan Review* Award.

As for Rahv, it would simply not have occurred to any regular reader of *Partisan Review,* either then or for years afterward, that he was anything but central to the magazine's purposes. Among its contributors, certainly, it was understood that it was Rahv who was mainly responsible for the magazine's special intellectual dynamism. My own experience was probably typical: When I started to contribute to *PR* in the early Fifties, three or four of my pieces appeared in its pages before anyone thought it necessary for me to be introduced to Rahv's co-editor.

But those were other times. Philip Rahv has been dead ten years, and he had lost

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control of the magazine some ten years earlier than that—a loss that marked an acceleration in *PR*'s precipitous decline. Now by a curious twist of fate he has been made the posthumous victim of something akin to the "memory hole" that currently governs the affairs of *Partisan Review*. So, for that matter, have George Orwell and a good many other writers, living and dead. Rahv's long-time co-editor and collaborator, William Phillips, now the surviving editor of a *Partisan Review* much altered in quality and purpose, has brought out an anthology called *Writers and Politics: A Partisan Review Reader.*[1] This is a volume that purports to "reflect the politics and literary tendencies of *Partisan Review* since its beginnings." But what it actually reflects is one of those victories over memory that Orwell characterized as "reality control." For toward the politics of the magazine "since its beginnings," this anthology (together with its various notes and prefaces) adopts a perspective best described as selective amnesia; and of the "literary tendencies" of *Partisan Review,* especially as they were manifested in the heyday of its influence in the Forties and Fifties, there is scarcely a trace. *Writers and Politics* turns out to be a very odd compilation, and only the first of the many bizarre things that one notices about this book is that it effectively eliminates Rahv from the history of the magazine that he dominated for so many years.

This breathtaking feat of "reality control" is accomplished with a display of intellectual arrogance that would be merely comical if ours were not indeed, as Rahv correctly observed, a "literary world . . . afflicted with an acute loss of memory." As it is, the special way Rahv has been eliminated from the history of *PR* is a matter of interest, if only as an index of the standards of intellectual probity that are nowadays accepted in certain highbrow circles. For Rahv's name is, to be sure, allowed to make a fleeting appearance on a list of "social critics" cited in the introduction to *Writers and Politics*—"critics like Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, Philip Rahv, and Stephen Spender"—quite as if Philip Rahv had been little more than an occasional contributor to *Partisan Review*. (And a not very important one, we may suppose, since, like certain other names on this list, he has been excluded from the new *Partisan Review Reader.*) Try to imagine George Jean Nathan contriving to eliminate the name of H. L. Mencken from the history of *The American Mercury* by relegating it to a benign list of "social critics" and you will have a rough parallel to what is being attempted here.

There are reasons, of course, why the name of Philip Rahv is likely to cause embarrassment to the present editors of *Partisan Review*—reasons, that is, which go beyond the personal enmity that erupted into open warfare in the Sixties and brought the collaboration of Rahv and Phillips to a bitter and acrimonious halt. We shall consider some of these reasons in due course, for they have much to contribute to an understanding of the contradictions and contortions of left-wing critical opinion in this country at the present time. Before doing so, however, it is important to recall the nature and extent of that collaboration and its role in shaping the ideological outlook not only of *Partisan Review* but of the community of intellectuals for which it once spoke.

Rahv's contributions as an editor and writer for *Partisan Review* played a key role in the formulation of the various "positions" the magazine adopted, most particularly on the subject of "writers and politics"—the ostensible theme of the anthology from which he has now been excluded—and, as it happens, some of his own essays on this subject were actually written in collaboration with none other than William Phillips. And it was Rahv and Phillips, of course, who together edited two earlier anthologies drawn from the pages of *Partisan Review* as well as several other collections of contem-

1 *Writers and Politics: A Partisan Review Reader,* edited by Edith Kurzweil and William Phillips. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 326 pages, $11.95 paperback

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porary writing.[2] Yet all evidence of that history has been suppressed in this new *Partisan Review Reader*. The palimpsest, as Orwell called it, has been reinscribed with a new past—and a somewhat paltry and twisted one it is.

For consider the writers—besides Rahv and Orwell, that is—who have been omitted from an anthology claiming to "reflect the politics and literary tendencies of *Partisan Review* since its beginnings": Mary McCarthy, Sidney Hook, Lionel Trilling, Harold Rosenberg, Lionel Abel, Clement Greenberg, F.W. Dupee, H.J. Kaplan, James T. Farrell, Leslie A. Fiedler, Delmore Schwartz, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., James Baldwin, James Burnham, Robert Warshow, Meyer Schapiro, Joseph Frank, Richard Chase, John Berryman, Randall Jarrell, Robert Gorham Davis, Jean-Paul Sartre, Edmund Wilson, William Troy, Alfred Kazin, Saul Bellow, Isaac Rosenfeld, Elizabeth Hardwick—but why go on? Lists are tedious, and this one is already long enough to suggest the kind of freedom that Mr. Phillips and his new collaborator, Edith Kurzweil, have allowed themselves in the preparation of this book. It is possible, I suppose, to excuse Professor Kurzweil, a sociologist who has only lately been installed as the magazine's executive editor, on grounds of inexperience. Her knowledge of the magazine's past appears, in any case, to be limited. A note informs us that she read some of the material in this anthology—presumably the articles published before her present tenure on the magazine—for the first time in assembling the book. Mr. Phillips, on the other hand, was one of the founding editors of *Partisan Review*. He has been there from the beginning. Indeed, since this anthology appears to regard 1937 as the date of the magazine's founding, it would be more accurate to say that he has been there from before the beginning. A younger and more forthright William Phillips, writing in collaboration with Philip Rahv in the Forties, gave us a much clearer account of the magazine's origins. In an essay called "In Retrospect: Ten Years of *Partisan Review*," which served as the epilogue to the first *Partisan Reader* in 1946, Phillips and Rahv wrote as follows:

> Conceived in the fall of 1933 and born in February 1934, the magazine emerged from the womb of the depression crying for a proletarian literature and a socialist America. The early Thirties, it will be recalled, were years of radical fervor, and many intellectuals, inspired by the promise of the classless Utopia, were converted to Marxism in theory and to the Communist Party in practice. A number of younger writers—not a few of whom mistook their revolutionary zeal for literary talent—felt it was their duty to lead the way, and throughout the country they banded together in John Reed Clubs with the aim of applying organizational methods to the enlistment of the arts in the service of the revolution. Naturally, the next step was to start new Left magazines, and the editors of this volume, together with a few other members of the local chapter, decided that the John Reed Club of New York must set the pace with a publication of its own.

Partisan Review was thus born as an organ of the Communist Party. Yet "its Stalinist period," as Phillips and Rahv were frank to call it, proved to be short-lived. "Gradually," they wrote in this "Retrospect,"

> . . . we came to the realization that the intellectual vulgarities we had decried had their source in the corruption and totalitarian essence of Stalinism itself. The last barriers of our faith were overthrown by the revelations of the Moscow trials, in the validity of which we could not believe for one moment; and soon we were convinced that this movement, afflicted with an incurable disease, was perverting intellectual life as it had perverted the libertarian ideals of the socialist tradition. It became

2 See especially *The Partisan Reader 1934-1944: An Anthology*, edited by William Phillips and Philip Rahv. Introduction by Lionel Trilling. The Dial Press, 1946. And *The New Partisan Reader 1945-1953*, edited by William Phillips and Philip Rahv. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953.

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> clear to us . . . that Stalinism was not the agent but the enemy of democratic socialism.

Admirable as this rejection of Stalinism was —and no one should underestimate the courage it required to make a public avowal of this rejection in the years preceding the Hitler-Stalin pact—it did not by any means mark an end to the political illusions that guided either *Partisan Review* or its editors. On the contrary, it would be a good deal more accurate to say that the rejection of Stalinism in favor of a purer, more "independent" form of Marxism inaugurated the period in which the political illusions of *Partisan Review* exerted their greatest influence on American intellectual life—an influence that is now such an integral part of the American intellectual climate that it is scarcely any longer recognized as an "influence" at all. Which is, of course, the reason why the tortuous ideological history of the magazine—and the various stratagems adopted to disguise and distort that history—remain an important subject for study today, even though *Partisan Review* itself has degenerated into something of an intellectual cipher.

In their 1946 "Retrospect," Phillips and Rahv described the new outlook of *Partisan Review* as it was reconstituted in 1937 after its fateful break with the Communist Party. "We conceived of ourselves as truly radical in the Marxist sense," they wrote, and then went on to describe their program:

> But our principal interest, editorially, was in bringing about a rapprochement between the radical tradition on the one hand and the tradition of modern literature on the other—a rapprochement that virtually all left-wing magazines had in the past done their utmost to prevent. It was our idea that this could not be accomplished by converting one tradition to the other, for the result of that could hardly be anything more than a false show of unity. It seemed to us that a reconciliation could be effected only by so modulating the expression of both traditions as to convey a sense at once of the tension between them and of their relevance to each other within the common framework of our civilization.

All of which sounds wonderfully intelligent and enlightened, and certainly represented a break with the more egregious crudities of intellectual Stalinism. That this program might also entail a profound contradiction did not go unnoticed, however.

> At this point [Phillips and Rahv wrote] we might add that not infrequently we have been asked to explain the ostensible lack of continuity between the social views stated in *Partisan Review* and some of its purely literary pieces. To this we have replied that there is no necessary contradiction in the attempt to maintain within one context an interest both in imaginative expression and in political ideas.

To raise the question of a contradiction was made to seem, if not actually a Stalinist idea, then somehow philistine and academic. "Actually," wrote Phillips and Rahv, "it is the extreme one-sidedness of modern intellectuality which makes it seem odd that an essay on Henry James or W. B. Yeats should appear side by side with an analysis, say, of the socio-economic theories of Rosa Luxemburg or of Stalin as an historical personality." By the time this "Retrospect" came to be written, the editors knew that they had hit upon a winning formula in combining the appeals of Marxism and modernism. "It is precisely from this union of sensibility with a radical temper," they declared, "that *Partisan Review* has derived its tone and quality," and they were certainly right on that score.

In practice this "union of sensibility with a radical temper" proved to be a remarkably flexible and resilient program for the magazine. The Marxist component in this "union" could be made as explicit or as implicit, as critical or as complaisant, as the times required. (Perhaps this is what is meant, after all, by an "independent" Marxism.) The exact degree to which the "radical temper" of the magazine was insisted upon

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varied a good deal from one period to another, and was very much determined by the pressure of events. "In the realm of action priorities may be inescapable," wrote Phillips and Rahv in their "Retrospect," "but in the realm of thought it is not always necessary to submit to them." Not "always," perhaps, but in the Forties and Fifties the success of *Partisan Review* owed much to the way the "realm of thought" reflected in the magazine was guided—not to say buffeted—by the "realm of action" occurring outside it. For this reason its post-Stalinist period of radical militancy proved to be almost as short-lived as its period of Stalinist conformity.[3] What ended *PR*'s period of radical militancy was that cataclysmic "realm of action" known as World War II, which left the magazine greatly altered in its outlook. For all practical purposes it was no longer "truly radical in the Marxist sense," however many rhetorical feints it might still make in the name of radical piety. It is interesting, in this regard, that in the 1946 "Retrospect" I have been quoting from, there is not a single reference to capitalism, for example, just as there are none to either Lenin or Leninism. The hard issues confronting the radical temper were somehow allowed to evaporate—or put on ice, at least, for another day. Colleagues who insisted on their urgency were sent packing—Dwight Macdonald's celebrated departure took place in 1943—as *PR* trimmed its radical sails and headed for the mainstream.

The politics that were of primary concern to *Partisan Review* in the postwar period were the politics of the death camps and the cold war. Much attention was given to the theory and practice of totalitarianism, and—what was clearly understood to be another aspect of the same phenomenon—to the threat represented by Stalin's expansionist policies abroad and terrorist policies at home. At the same time, the magazine emerged for the first time as the leading literary and critical journal of the day. There was so little trace of the old radical militancy that when, in 1952, the magazine published a lengthy symposium on "Our Country and Our Culture," which ran through four consecutive issues, the only really virulent anti-American, anti-capitalist contributions came from two younger writers, Norman Mailer and Irving Howe, sounding in this company like refugees from a time-warp who, against all the odds, had somehow managed to keep their Trotskyite pieties completely quarantined from the experience of history.

Yet despite this general retreat from radical militancy, it is no idle paradox to suggest that much of the appeal of *Partisan Review,* even at the height of the cold war when it was so firmly anti-Communist in its political views, lay in the impression it nonetheless managed to convey that it still belonged to the Left—and indeed, to the only Left worth belonging to—and that its special mission in bringing about "a rapprochement between the radical tradition on the one hand and the tradition of modern literature on the other" continued to guarantee its place in the cultural vanguard. Never mind that the tradition of modern literature was now firmly entrenched in the college syllabus, and that most of *PR*'s editors and contributors had themselves become college teachers. This made their position all the more respectable. Never mind, either, that the radical tradition was in a state of complete intellectual disarray. This made their reverence for that tradition all the more poignant. However muted and discreet the magazine's radical pieties may have become in the period after World War II, what *Partisan Review* carried into the mainstream of American intellectual

3 It was this short, post-Stalinist, so-called "Trotskyist" period of radical militancy on which Murray Kempton lavished such unembarrassed nostalgia when he came to review William Barrett's *The Truants* ("Dishonoring *Partisan Review*," in *Grand Street,* Summer 1982). As if to give us the full flavor of that period, Kempton called Barrett a "Judas" for taking a very different view of *PR*'s history. Oddly enough, this halcyon period in the history of American radicalism was allowed to pass unnoticed in Kempton's own history of the Thirties, *Part of Our Time* (Simon & Schuster, 1955).

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life in the postwar era was the *idea,* which by this time had assumed the status of a benign and prestigious myth, that modernism and Marxism were somehow the natural and inevitable component parts of any really "advanced" view of the cultural situation. The curious thing about the Marxist element in this outlook is that it demanded nothing very much in the way of concrete belief. It seemed hardly to matter that the Marxism in question was a tattered and disenchanted Marxism—a Marxism virtually devoid of discernible content. It was nonetheless *there,* a precious and pervasive residue of shared assumptions and ardently remembered debates, a mode of feeling even more than a mode of thought, the result of a failed love affair with history and ideology that had left even its brokenhearted casualties permanently enthralled and thus more or less incapable of forming an enduring and authentic attachment to ideas of another order.

To the casual reader of *Partisan Review* in the Fifties, this sentimental Marxism (as it may correctly be called) was scarcely noticeable, however. Only on rare occasions did it declare itself—usually, as it happened, when Irving Howe was periodically unleashed to attack all and sundry for an apostasy which, in the true spirit of the old "radical tradition," was invariably ascribed to a venal and self-serving retreat from radical virtue. But even these hell-fire sermons seemed almost more like intellectual divertissements than serious auguries. They might signify a split of some sort—and to the knowledgeable, of course, they did—but how could they be regarded as paramount when Phillips and Rahv were otherwise so evidently determined to keep *PR* from lapsing into the kind of radical sectarianism they seemed to fear even more than the "conformism" they were sometimes accused of fostering? Radical sectarianism was something the editors of *Partisan Review* were clearly content to leave to *Dissent,* the socialist journal launched by Howe in the Fifties. *Dissent* was just militant enough to keep the radical position at a simmer and just boring enough so as not to pose a direct threat to *PR* itself. For the moment *Partisan Review* seemed, on the political side, securely anchored to the liberal anti-Communism of the period. In conversation, to be sure, its editors might mock one or another figure connected with *Commentary* or *The New Leader* or the American Committee for Cultural Freedom or, for that matter, even some of the people who served on *PR*'s own editorial board, for services rendered to the anti-Communist cause, just as they were given to mocking the New Critics and other members of the literary academy in which they were themselves now becoming a force. But all this seemed incidental to the magazine's public role and true purposes. Rahv, for example, might criticize the politics of *Commentary* and *The New Leader*—I often heard him do so—but he continued to write for them, all the same. He might denounce certain figures connected with the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, but he did not balk when the Committee took over as *PR*'s publisher and sponsor. And however opposed he might be to the ideas of the New Critics, he nonetheless published them in his magazine and welcomed the opportunity to join forces with John Crowe Ransom in organizing the summer program of the School of Letters first at Kenyon College and then at Indiana University. The truth is, he was as eager to become a figure in the academic literary establishment as it was emerging in the Fifties as he was to maintain cordial relations with the liberal anti-Communist establishment represented by the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, for both embodied in his eyes the kind of power and influence and prestige he coveted. I doubt if even he entirely understood where his true loyalties in this period lay. If there was an element of intellectual deception in the policies that governed *Partisan Review* in the Fifties, there was probably an even greater element of self-deception.

Only once in this period was I myself given a momentary glimpse of that tenacious attachment to the old radical faith which

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remained for Rahv an enduring object of belief, however he might conceal it in his writings of the time, and which flared into the open once again in the last years of his life when he re-emerged as what Frederick Crews aptly described as a "born-again Leninist." The occasion was a party given by William Phillips, and the date was some time in 1956. The principal topic of discussion that evening was Khrushchev's "secret" speech to the Communist Party Congress in Moscow denouncing Stalin's crimes, for news of this epochal event had quickly gotten out and led to an immense amount of speculation about not only the future of the Soviet Union but the nature of totalitarianism itself. To my astonishment, however—I was inexperienced in these matters—the really burning issue for those assembled that evening was something else, namely, the question of whether Khrushchev's speech would lead to the rehabilitation of Trotsky! I confess to feeling somewhat numbed by this turn in the discussion. Compared to the enormity of what had long been occurring in the Soviet Union and the implications of Khrushchev's speech, the question of Trotsky's rehabilitation seemed almost comically beside the point. Yet the issue was not at all comical, of course—though it took me years to understand why. For if Trotsky could still be rehabilitated, then the "revolution" itself—the true revolution, the revolution of Lenin and Trotsky—might still be saved. The thought of saving the revolution from Stalin's so-called "perversion" of it—this, clearly, had never entirely been given up on as an article of faith and hope even among these staunch anti-Communists. It was all very perplexing and very troubling. About the question under discussion, though, Rahv had no illusions. He firmly predicted that there would be no rehabilitation of Trotsky, and about that at least he was right. But the aching disappointment with which he made that dour prediction, the evident emotion that it cost him to acknowledge this lost hope—all of this left me wondering about the political illusions that at some level of consciousness had persisted throughout all the vicissitudes of his own and of *PR*'s intellectual history.

Some years later, as we know, when the social and political upheavals of the Sixties ushered in a new period of revolutionism, Rahv recovered from the disappointments and accommodations of the Fifties and made, so to speak, an honest man of himself by reverting to the radicalism of his youth with a vehemence that was shocking even to his friends. He went so far as to attack Irving Howe on grounds of the latter's anti-Stalinism, and actually defended the Soviet Union against the United States as a political model. Both William Barrett (in *The Truants*) and Norman Podhoretz (in *Breaking Ranks*) have already given us vivid accounts of this terrible episode, and there is no need to rehearse all of its squalid details here. What is worth recalling, however, is the critique of *Partisan Review* that Rahv embarked upon when he broke with the magazine in the Sixties. When he launched a new journal called *Modern Occasions* in the fall of 1970, it soon became apparent that one of the first orders of business would be to carry out a kind of "deconstruction" of the old *PR*. Thus, the first number carried an attack on the art criticism of Clement Greenberg, the second carried an attack on Lionel Trilling, and so on. I saw a good deal of Rahv in those days, and actually contributed an article (on the contemporary art scene) to the first number of *Modern Occasions*. I hadn't yet understood that his allies in this new venture would include figures like Noam Chomsky. I suppose that I couldn't quite believe that he was as far gone politically or as consumed by rage personally as he was. I urged him not to publish the attack on Greenberg, with whose ideas I often disagreed but whom I nonetheless regarded—and still regard—as the finest art critic of his day. But Rahv was adamant—he had some score to settle—even though he knew the article was poorly written. I wrote him a scathing letter about the attack on Trilling, which he replied to by complaining that the article actually hadn't gone far enough. The hatred that he now felt for his former

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friends and colleagues knew no bounds.

Still, because Rahv was desperate for allies and contributors—he constantly complained about the "kids" and the "professors" he was now reduced to working with—he seemed willing to put up with almost any amount of disagreement if he thought he might be able to enlist your services in one of his crusades against *Partisan Review*. His last request to me came in the summer of 1972. *PR* had just published a symposium called "Art, Culture and Conservatism," which consisted of an essay by Richard Gilman called "The Idea of the Avant-Garde" and commentaries by some nineteen other writers, all in one way or another concerned to defend avant-garde art and political radicalism against "conservative" opposition. Had many of these commentaries appeared in some other journal, Rahv would probably have found much in them to agree with. As it was, he was eager to have me write an attack on this symposium for *Modern Occasions*. I refused. I found much to disagree with in this symposium—more, probably, than Rahv himself—but I had just completed a long essay called "The Age of the Avant-Garde" on this same subject. At the last minute I inserted a brief footnote commenting on the *PR* symposium, and sent off the essay to Norman Podhoretz at *Commentary*. I had already committed the essay to *Commentary*, and I knew in any case that Rahv would loathe many of the views expressed in it, especially those that concerned the relationship (as I saw it) between the avant-garde and the liberal middle class. I duly wrote him a note explaining the situation, and knew I would never hear from him again. (For *Commentary*, of course, was another publication he hated.) I never did. Had Rahv lived and his magazine continued publication, I have no doubt that my book, *The Age of the Avant-Garde*, which was published around the time that he died, would have been accorded the same treatment that he had arranged for Greenberg, Trilling, and others. As it happened, however, it was his old collaborator—William Phillips—who only last year got around to denouncing me as, of all things, an "anti-modernist," conveniently forgetting that it was in the pages of *Partisan Review* that I had made my debut as an art critic some thirty years earlier, and overlooking the fact that, owing to the accident of my employment as the art critic for *The New York Times* for many years, I had probably written more words explaining and defending modernist art than any other living writer.

But then, there is so much that William Phillips has forgotten or overlooked. The "memory hole" over which he presides is capacious indeed. For he, too, once he had wrested control of *Partisan Review* from Rahv and joined forces—temporarily, as it turned out—with a new collaborator, Richard Poirier, had mounted his own sort of "deconstruction" of the old *PR*. Politically, once the radical movement of the Sixties moved into high gear, there were actually few, if any, significant differences separating Phillips and Rahv—though Phillips, as far as I know, has never gone as far as to defend the Soviet Union. Being by temperament more cautious and circumspect, he has usually left it to others to write the more blatant political pieces in *PR*. All the same, and whatever the qualms Phillips might have felt about some of the political views that now peppered the pages of the magazine, *PR* rejoined the radical movement in the Sixties. What seemed really to engage Phillips's editorial attention, however, was the new cultural scene that the Sixties gave us—the so-called "new sensibility," with its interest in Camp, pornography, popular culture, and other phenomena which, both in spirit and in substance, represented the exact opposite of everything *PR* had stood for in the past. It was on this score that there was some real disagreement with Rahv, who felt a positive horror for anything connected with the "new sensibility" of the Sixties.

Whether in fact the "new sensibility" was really congenial to Phillips's tastes, or whether he was pressured by Poirier and others into giving it priority in the magazine—the deadly academic prose that now

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found its way into *PR* in large quantities suggested that Poirier played a considerable role in its editorial affairs—or whether the bandwagon of fashion was too much for Phillips to resist, who can say? Such developments are usually not traceable to single causes. All we can say for certain is that *PR* now reversed its course on most of the cultural questions it had long been concerned with. The defense of high culture was abandoned to accommodate the prestige that the "new sensibility" now conferred upon popular culture. The interest in modernism was scuttled in favor of the new modes of postmodernist expression. Political criteria were now more crudely applied to cultural issues than ever before, and the magazine even took the unusual step of publishing attacks on its own past (though to spare Phillips embarrassment, I suppose, *PR* was not usually mentioned by name in them). Two of these attacks—Irving Howe's "Radical Questions and the American Intellectual" (1966) and Morris Dickstein's "Cold War Blues: Notes on the Culture of the Fifties" (1974)—are among the longer pieces that Phillips and Kurzweil have now included in their new anthology.

As often happens, however, with anthologies based on criteria other than quality, *Writers and Politics* tends to be more interesting for what it omits than for what it includes. From *Partisan Review* in the Thirties, for example, we are vouchsafed but a single contribution: Trotsky's "Art and Politics" (1938). Was there *nothing* else, then, worth preserving from this first, crucial period of the magazine's existence—nothing that would illuminate "the politics and literary tendencies of *Partisan Review* since its beginnings"? Even at the risk of encumbering this discussion with another tedious list, I cannot refrain from citing the full roster of contributors to a single issue of *PR* in this period (in this case, the issue of December 1937): Delmore Schwartz, Wallace Stevens, Edmund Wilson, James T. Farrell, Pablo Picasso, Lionel Abel, James Agee, Dwight Macdonald, Mary McCarthy, Sidney Hook, Philip Rahv, William Troy, F.W. Dupee, George L.K. Morris, Lionel Trilling, and Arthur Mizener. What other magazine of the time could equal this dazzling roster? And what does it mean for an editor and an intellectual to repudiate his own past—and not the worst elements of that past, but the *best*—in so categorical a manner?

Alas, the Forties do not fare much better. There is Arthur Koestler's essay on "The Intelligentsia" (1944) and Phillips's own piece on "The Intellectuals' Tradition" (1941) and Dwight Macdonald's "Reading from Left to Right" (1941)—and that's all. Does this sound a little thin? Especially in view of what *PR* actually published in the Forties? Well, it's worse than that. Was it really necessary to dredge up this unlovely item from the Macdonald bibliography, for example—"The war is constantly exposing the meaninglessness of the concept, 'democracy,' in the modern capitalist world"; "Thus it is with the greatest of all the lunacies of modern capitalism: the fact that its only perspective is mass slaughter and devastation," etc.—when *PR* itself repudiated this line by breaking with Macdonald in 1943? In *The New Partisan Reader,* which Phillips and Rahv brought out in 1953, Macdonald isn't even represented. Does it confer any honor on either the writer or the magazine for us to be reminded that this is what once passed for serious political analysis?

The Fifties, needless to say, are all but erased. Of the four entries from that decade, two are by writers who subsequently became Nobel laureates—Camus and Milosz. There is a short report on the Sartre-Camus quarrel by Nicola Chiaromonte (1952), and an essay by Hannah Arendt on "Tradition and the Modern Age" (1954). Otherwise the political and intellectual history of *Partisan Review* in the Fifties has been left to the mercies of the "memory hole." It will come as no surprise, then, that the Sixties and the Seventies fare somewhat better in terms of numbers if not in terms of intellectual quality. Susan Sontag's "Yugoslav Report" (1966), Barbara Rose's "Protest in Art" (1973), Richard Gilman's essay on the

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avant-garde—Phillips and Kurzweil seem to have an unfailing gift for seizing upon precisely those pieces that have aged badly. Undoubtedly the most important essay published in *Partisan Review* in the Sixties was Sontag's "Notes on 'Camp'"—for it was that essay which marked a decisive turn in the magazine's critical and cultural perspective. Naturally, it isn't included in the new anthology. The truth is, the editors are no better at representing the "new" *Partisan Review* than they are at representing the "old." And no more honest, either. Poirier, like Rahv, has been tossed down the "memory hole," too.

The volume closes with a curious and ineffectual symposium on "Neoconservatism" dating from 1980. The only thing really interesting about this discussion is the role it seems to play in William Phillips's current intellectual outlook. To judge from this and other comments on Neoconservatism in recent issues of *Partisan Review,* this movement seems to act upon him like some sort of magic stimulant. The sheer fact of the movement's existence seems to provide him with an intellectual "high" he otherwise finds it difficult to achieve nowadays. Without it, I suppose, he would find it hard to feel as radical as he would like. Yet, as has so often been the case with Phillips, it is the visibility and prestige of the movement rather than its intellectual substance which engages his interest. Of that substance he clearly understands nothing.

Writers and Politics represents a sad and shabby end to what was once one of the most extraordinary enterprises in American intellectual life. And quite the shabbiest thing about it is the way it takes refuge in the "memory hole" as a way of avoiding all the difficult questions that it was once the function of *Partisan Review* and its writers to ask. What a way to go.

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Ralph Ellison and a literary "ancestor": Dostoevsky

by Joseph Frank

When I was invited not long ago to contribute to a volume of essays honoring the achievements of Ralph Ellison, I very much wanted to add my voice to the tributes being assembled for an old friend and a writer of major stature. But I hesitated at first because, in the years since *Invisible Man* had been published, I had lost touch with the new wave of Afro-American literature in which Ellison now takes so prominent a place. But then, remembering his love for, and familiarity with, the writings of Dostoevsky, it occurred to me that I could perhaps combine my knowledge of the Russian author with the desire publicly to express all my admiration of Ellison's achievement. With this idea in mind, I began to re-read his book, and was delighted to discover (or rediscover what had probably been forgotten) that my choice of subject was not as arbitrary as I had feared it might be. For in focusing on the relation between the two writers, I was only following a lead given by Ellison himself.

In his essay "The World and the Jug," Ralph Ellison makes an important distinction between what he calls his "relatives" and his "ancestors." Irving Howe had criticized him for not being enough of a "protest writer" to satisfy Howe's conception of what a Negro writer should be, Howe's ideal at the time being the highly politicized Richard Wright. In explaining why Wright had not influenced him in any significant fashion, despite his great respect for Wright's achievement, Ellison discriminates between various types of influence. "Relatives" are those with whom, by accident of birth, one is naturally associated. Negro authors like Wright and Langston Hughes, not to mention many others, are Ellison's "relatives." But, he remarks, "while one can do nothing about choosing one's relatives, one can, as an artist, choose one's ancestors." And among such "ancestors," among those who had truly stimulated his own artistic impulses and ambitions, he lists T. S. Eliot, Malraux, Hemingway, Faulkner—and Dostoevsky.

The most obvious connection between Ellison and Dostoevsky, which has often been pointed out, is that between *Invisible Man* and *Notes from Underground*. Indeed, the resemblances between the two works are self-evident, although they should not be pushed too far. Both are written in the first-person confessional form; in both the narrator is filled with rage and indignation because of the humiliations he is forced to endure; in both he explodes with fury against those responsible for subjecting him to such indignities; and both characters finally retreat to their "underground." The underground man retreats symbolically, back to the squalid hole-in-the-corner where he lives; the invisible man retreats literally, first to the coal cellar into which he falls accidentally during the Harlem race riot, and then to the abandoned basement of the prologue, where he hibernates and meditates. (It should be

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remarked that, in the "underground railway," the metaphor of the underground has an indigenous American meaning far richer than anything that can be found in nineteenth-century Russia, and Ralph Ellison did not have to read Dostoevsky to become aware of its symbolic resonances; but his reading of Dostoevsky no doubt gave him a heightened sense of its literary possibilities.)

What stands out for me, however, is not so much the "underground" imagery of the two books, or the many similarities between the underground man's rejection of the world in which he lives and the invisible man's rejection of his. Much more fundamental is Ellison's profound grasp of the ideological inspiration of Dostoevsky's work, and his perception of its relevance to his own creative purposes—his perception, that is, of how he could use Dostoevsky's relation to the Russian culture of his time to express his own position as an American Negro writer in relation to the dominating white culture. Despite the vast differences in their two situations, Ralph Ellison was able to penetrate to the underlying structural similarities beneath the obvious surface differences.

What, after all, motivates the revolt of Dostoevsky's underground man against his world? It is the impossibility he feels of being able to live humanly within categories that, although he has learned to accept them about himself, have been imposed on him by others. As Dostoevsky saw them, these categories had been imported into Russia from European culture. (Dostoevsky was far from being the only prominent Russian to take such a view; the revolutionary Alexander Herzen, for one, shared exactly the same idea.) As a result, they are categories that the underground man finds to be profoundly in contradiction with his moral being. The revolt of the underground man is a refusal to accept a definition of himself, a definition of his own nature, in terms imposed by the alien world of European culture. At the same time, like all other educated Russians, he has assimilated and accepted the ideas and values of this alien world (accepted them, that is, with the rational and self-conscious part of his personality) because of their superior authority and prestige.

This is the very situation in which the invisible man finds himself all through Ellison's book. The invisible man stands in relation to white American culture and *its* ideas and values as Dostoevsky's underground man stands in relation to West European culture. For the invisible man discovers that all of its definitions of himself, all the structures within which it wishes to place him as a Negro, violate some aspect of his own integrity. No more than the underground man is he willing to accept such a situation passively; and he rejects each of these structures in turn the moment he realizes their true import.

The form of *Invisible Man,* as an ideological novel, is essentially the same as that of *Notes from Underground,* though Ellison's work is conceived on a much larger scale. Each major sequence dramatizes the confrontation between the invisible man and some type of social or cultural trap—a road opens up before him only to end in a blind alley, a possibility of freedom tempts him but then only imprisons him once again. Similarly, each of the two episodes in Dostoevsky's work unmasks the morally detrimental consequences of the two dominating ideologies that, because of the force of European ideas on the Russian psyche, had ensnared the Russian intelligentsia. (The materialism and ethical utilitarianism of the 1860s is parodied in Part I of *Notes from Underground*; the "humanitarian" and "philanthropic" utopian socialism of the 1840s is the butt of Part II.)

The invisible man too is a member of the American Negro intelligentsia, or has at least been chosen to be educated as one; and his adventures reveal the bankruptcy of all the doctrines that this intelligentsia has accepted up to the present from the hands of the whites. Such doctrines include the assimilationism of the carefully tailored and prettified Negro college that the invisible man attends; the Africanism of Ras the Exhorter, which is finally only a mirror image of white

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racism despite the dignity and purity of the passion at its source; and the radical politics embodied in the Brotherhood. When the Brotherhood provokes a race riot, it is employing the very tactics of the-worse-the-better that Dostoevsky understood very well, and had dramatized in *The Devils,* a novel that, among many other things, is a handbook of extremist politics.

Notes from Underground and *Invisible Man* thus undertake essentially the same task, and both perform it superbly. But one should not press the comparison too hard. Ellison took from Dostoevsky what he needed, but used it in his own way. Actually, *Invisible Man* is more an extrapolation than an imitation of *Notes from Underground.* Ellison portrays the *process* through which the invisible man becomes disillusioned with his previous conceptions, while this process is more or less taken for granted by Dostoevsky. We do not really follow the underground man stage by stage in his development; we never see him in that state of innocent acceptance typical of the invisible man. *Invisible Man* ends where *Notes from Underground* begins; the two works overlap only in the framing sections of *Invisible Man,* the prologue and epilogue. Here Ellison's narrator directly expresses the conflict in himself between his refusal *entirely* to abandon the ideals he has accepted up to this point (in the hope of fashioning some *modus vivendi* with the white world), and his rejection of all the forms in which this *modus* has presented itself to him. Dostoevsky's character is caught in exactly the same sort of conflict: his acceptance of European ideas is at war with his moral instincts. "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" the invisible man suggests to his (white) reader, who is incapable of seeing him for what he truly is but nonetheless shares with him the same tragic dilemma. The underground man addresses himself to *his* scornful and mocking readers in exactly the same way at the conclusion of *Notes from Underground.* "We are even so tired of being men, men of real, *our own* flesh and blood, that we have reached the point of being ashamed of it," he says; "we consider it a disgrace, and aspire to dissolve into some sort of abstract man who has never existed." He does not exclude himself from this accusation, and speaks, at the same time, for all those who will sneer at his words.

Dostoevsky's novella is primarily a lengthy interior monologue of inner conflict, expressed in both ideological and psychological terms. *Invisible Man* is a negative *Bildungsroman,* in which the narrator-hero learns that everything he has been taught to believe by his various mentors is actually false and treacherous. His experiences can thus be considered to be those of a black Candide. There is, to be sure, very little of Candide in the underground man, but even when Ellison swerves from Dostoevsky, he instinctively moves in a direction Dostoevsky wished to take himself. For one of Dostoevsky's cherished literary projects—one that he never got around to realizing—was to write what he called in his notes "a Russian *Candide.*"

A work of Dostoevsky's that bears a much less explicit connection with Ellison's *Invisible Man* is *House of the Dead,* Dostoevsky's sketches of life in the Siberian prison camp where he served a term of four years. There is certainly no obvious literary similarity between the two books; but Ellison himself points toward a connection by remarking, in *Shadow and Act,* on "Dostoevsky's profound study of the humanity of Russian criminals." For my part, I am convinced that the effect of *House of the Dead* on Ellison's sensibility was more profound than has ever been suspected. It affected him strongly and personally, and provided him with a powerful precedent for entering into a positive relation with the Negro folk culture he had imbibed from the cradle.

One of the outstanding characteristics of *Invisible Man* is its use of Negro folk culture, not as a source of quaint exoticism and "folksy" local color, but as a symbol of a realm of values set off against the various ideologies with which the narrator becomes engaged. What these values are is expressed

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in Ellison's famous definition of "the blues": "an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism." It is this quality of American Negro folk sensibility that Ellison embodies in such a character as Peter Wheatstraw, who arouses the admiration of the still naïve invisible man even though the latter has been taught, in accordance with the standards of educated white society, to look down on Wheatstraw's punning speech-style and versifying idioms as primitive and demeaning. "God damn, I thought, they're a hell of a people!" writes the invisible man after this encounter. "And I didn't know whether it was pride or disgust that suddenly flashed over me."

This uncertainty represents the clash within the narrator of his instinctive response to the indigenous forms of cultural expression of his people, with all the toughness and resilience of spirit that they embody, and the response instilled by his education: "I'd known the stuff from childhood, but had forgotten it; had learned it *back of school.*" Part of what he discovers in the course of the book is the value of what he had been taught to discard.

This is where *House of the Dead* enters the picture. For while it would be nonsensical to imagine that Ralph Ellison needed Dostoevsky to make him aware of the richness and depth of Negro folk culture, Dostoevsky could (and did) serve as an invaluable and prestigious literary "ancestor" who had had to fight the same battle on behalf of the Russian peasant culture of his own time.

American readers will find it difficult to imagine that Russians could once have looked down on their own peasant culture as whites (and Negroes wishing to conform to white cultural standards) looked down upon the Negro folk culture developed in the slave society of the American South. But such was the rage for Europeanization in Russia, such the rejection of all vestiges of the Russian past as "barbarous" and "regressive," that exactly the same prejudice prevailed. Anything not conforming to the standards of Europeanization was scorned and ridiculed. This situation reached such a degree of self-negation that the Russian upper class hardly any longer spoke its own language. (It will be recalled that, at the beginning of *War and Peace,* a discussion of the threat of Napoleon at an aristocratic gathering is conducted not in Russian, but in French.) One of the most important works that broke the grip of this prejudice was *House of the Dead,* in which Dostoevsky not only depicts for the first time the "humanity" of "criminals" (the men he wrote about were criminals technically, but a good many had landed in Siberia only because they had reacted violently to the prevailing injustice and ill-treatment of their class), but also uncovers the hidden treasures of Russian peasant culture.

Dostoevsky managed to keep a notebook while in prison camp in which he wrote down peasant expressions, proverbs, songs, and anecdotes. These revealed to him an independent, strong-willed, tough-minded outlook on life that he came to admire and even to think superior, in some of its moral aspects, to the advanced, "progressive" views he had once accepted. *House of the Dead* is really a story of his re-education along such lines, which finally allowed him to recognize the riches of the way of life of his own people. Could not this be said as well to be one of the major thematic aims of *Invisible Man*? One can only speculate on the effect that reading such a work had on the young Ralph Ellison, wrestling with the problem of reconciling what he had learned in school (his first ambition, after all, had been to become a *classical* composer) with what he had picked up "back of school." We do know that he later became a writer who, while measuring himself by the highest standards of the great modern masters, refused to see any contradiction between his exalted literary ambitions and his admiration for the far from classical world of American Negro folk music and folk life.

Dostoevsky's book would thus unques-

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tionably have helped Ellison to find his own way. And if we read *House of the Dead* from this angle, it is not too difficult to spot passages that might have had particular importance for him. Would he not have been struck, for example, by Dostoevsky's suggestion that, so far as the Russian educated class is concerned, the Russian peasant is really *invisible*? "You may have to do with peasants all your life," he tells his educated readers, "you may associate with them every day for forty years, officially for instance, in the regulation and administrative forms, or even simply in a friendly way, as a benefactor or, in a certain sense, a father—you will never know them really. It will all be *an optical illusion,* and nothing more. I know that all who read will think I am exaggerating. But I am convinced of its truth. I have reached this conviction, not from books, not from abstract theory, but from reality, and I have had plenty of time to verify it."

One can go through the whole book in this way and pick out episode after episode that could have impressed the young Ellison as being directly relevant to his own creative problems. There is the incident where Dostoevsky, who had formerly believed that the backward *muzhik* was a bungling and incompetent worker, suddenly discovers, because he is now a member of the work convoy himself, that the supposed "incompetence" is really a form of sabotage. When the peasant-convicts get the conditions they want, "there was no trace of laziness, no trace of incompetence . . . . The work went like wildfire. Everyone seemed wonderfully intelligent all of a sudden." And there was the revelation of the peasant-convict orchestra "playing the simple peasant instruments," some of them homemade. "The blending and harmony of sounds, above all, the spirit, the character of the conception and rendering of the tune in its very essence were simply amazing. For the first time I realized all the reckless dash and gaiety of the gay dashing Russian dance songs." The spirit of the people emerged and could be felt in their own music, which for the first time Dostoevsky—who had previously been an inveterate concertgoer—was able to estimate at its true worth. Such a passage would surely have strengthened Ralph Ellison's determination to win for the folk music of his own people (jazz, the blues, spirituals) the recognition it deserved as a valid artistic expression of their own complex sense of life.

Many other instances of the same kind could be adduced as Dostoevsky undergoes that transvaluation of values—the same transvaluation undergone by the invisible man—in favor of the peasant-convicts and against the "enlightened" and "civilized" standards of educated Russian society. The representatives of that society constantly speak of "justice," but assume that they have the right to a leading place in the world. How different from the peasant-convicts at the prison theatricals, who give Dostoevsky a front-row seat because they feel it "just" to do so. Dostoevsky is a connoisseur of the theater, who could appreciate all the nuances of the performance; therefore he "deserves" a better place. "The highest and most striking characteristic of our people," Dostoevsky writes of this incident, "is just their sense of justice and their eagerness for it. There is no trace in the common people of the desire to be cock of the walk on all occasions and at all costs, whether they deserve to be or not . . . . There is not much our wise men could teach them. On the contrary, I think it is the wise men who ought to learn from the people."

What is most important, however, is Dostoevsky's clear-eyed and unblinking ability to look the facts about the Russian peasant in the face; not to sentimentalize or gild or touch up their benightedness, backwardness, and sometimes terrible cruelty. And his ability to understand, at the same time, that these repulsive aspects of their lives were the result of the age-old oppression in which they had been forced to survive. He was capable of discerning whatever spark of humanity continued to exist under such conditions, and he believed that such a spark *must* exist somewhere no matter how much appearances might suggest its extinction. This same capacity is condensed in the ob-

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servation of Ralph Ellison's that "the extent of beatings and psychological maiming meted out by Southern Negro parents rivals those described by nineteenth-century Russian writers as characteristic of peasant life under the Czars. The horrible thing is that the cruelty is also an expression of concern, of love." Such a remark could only have come from Ellison's intimate identification with the spirit in which Dostoevsky had portrayed Russian peasant life, and Ellison's awareness of the extent to which it had helped him enter into a genuinely creative relation with his own world.

House of the Dead stands out from Dostoevsky's other books by its descriptive and plotless character. It is a series of sketches focusing on a milieu and a collectivity, which resembles a piece of reportage more than a novel. One would hardly think it written by the same author who gives us such febrile and tightly wound dramatizations of the philosophical and ideological dilemmas of the Russian intelligentsia. Its effect on Ralph Ellison is much more in the realm of attitudes and idea-feelings than in that of artistic technique. Yet there is one point at which *Invisible Man* and *House of the Dead* come together artistically in a remarkable fashion, and where a direct, artistic influence may be inferred. Or if not, the parallel is all the more worth mentioning because it reveals how close the two are in their grasp of human existence.

One of the high points of Ellison's narrative is Jim Trueblood's story about the violation of his daughter, with whom, while half-asleep and dreaming, he unwittingly commits incest. Its parallel in *House of the Dead* is a narrative entitled "Akulka's Husband." Both are written in the form of what is called a *skaz* in Russian criticism, that is, a first-person oral tale strongly colored by the speech-style of the teller. In Ellison's story, the speaker is a Southern Negro tenant farmer; in Dostoevsky's, it is a Russian peasant. Both recount what is, in fact, a criminal transgression of the laws of God and man—in the first case incest, in the second, the deliberate murder of an innocent wife by a craven, resentful, sadistic husband who has already beaten his victim half to death.

What unites these stories—and Dostoevsky's is by far the more frightful—is the unsparing way they depict the unforgivable and unredeemable, and yet manage to do so in a manner that affirms the humanity of the people involved rather than negating it. Jim Trueblood's deed is not an act of lust or animal passion but an accident caused by being forced through poverty to sleep with his wife and grown-up daughter in the same bed. He tells what occurred as a deeply moral man, bewildered and disturbed by his own transgression, even ready to let his outraged wife chop off his head with an ax (though she is finally unable to bring herself to the act). He goes through a period of mortification ("I don't eat nothin' and I don't drink nothin' and caint sleep at night"). One night, looking up at the stars, he starts to sing, and "*ends up* singin' the blues." He then returns to his family to begin life anew and shoulder the burden of what he has done—and yet not *really* done.

In Dostoevsky's tale, it is not the narrator whose ineradicable human quality emerges in this way, although we are made to realize that he kills because of intolerable personal humiliation—which at least saves him from being taken only as a bloodthirsty sadist. It is rather the murdered wife and the man she loves, Filka Morozov, who suddenly reveal a depth of sentiment that one would not have suspected. Until this happens, the wife has been only a piteous victim, Filka only a headstrong and reckless scoundrel who had slandered the girl unmercifully in order to take revenge on her domineering father, with whom he had quarreled. It is Filka who is responsible for all the torments she has had to endure, including a forced marriage to her weak-willed husband. But then, just before he is taken away for military service (which meant that he would probably never return), Filka proclaims her innocence to the entire village, bowing down at her feet; and she forgives him, declaring her love in the same ritual manner and heightened poetic speech. The tale is suddenly lit up by

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a flash of the purest feeling and the tenderest human emotion, only to sink back into darkness again with the murder. But we do not forget, after this flash, that the participants are *people,* not inhuman monsters; and we derive this same knowledge from the narrative of Jim Trueblood. Ellison drives home to us as Americans the same point Dostoevsky had driven home to his Russian readers a hundred years earlier.

There is still another important relation between Ralph Ellison and Dostoevsky worth discussing: the convergence of the two writers when they defend the integrity of art and the independence of the artist from ideological dictates and constraints imposed by the guardians (unofficial in both cases, but not to remain so in Dostoevsky's homeland) of the collective conscience.

Most of the incidental journalism in which Dostoevsky defended his position has not been translated at all, or has been put into English rather recently. But Ralph Ellison did not have to read Dostoevsky's journalism to find himself confronted with the same problems. The attitude about art against which Dostoevsky had fought in the early 1860s has become, through the triumph and worldwide influence of Russian Communism, the dogma automatically imposed on artists anywhere who become involved with radical politics. Ralph Ellison, like so many others (and like Dostoevsky himself in the 1840s), went through such a phase. Finding himself subject to the authority and censure of the cultural commissars, he reacted against them exactly as Dostoevsky had done.

Very early in Dostoevsky's career, he ran into efforts to influence and control the nature of his literary production. The host of the radical circle whose meetings he attended, Mikhail Petrshevsky, criticized him for not writing overt social propaganda that would further the cause of progress. The best critic of the time, V. G. Belinsky, who had hailed Dostoevsky's first novel, *Poor Folk,* as a masterpiece, also thought that Dostoevsky's later work in the 1840s was deficient in social content. But Dostoevsky resisted the criticism of both men. He even told Belinsky that the influential critic "was giving literature a partial significance unworthy of it, degrading it to the description, if one may so express it, *solely of journalistic facts,* or scandalous occurrences."[1]

What is important about Dostoevsky's opposition to such views is that he did *not* defend the autonomy of art in the terms that have come to be known as "art for art's sake." He did not argue that, since art was its own supreme value, a writer could legitimately neglect the social arena in pursuit of its perfection. Dostoevsky accepted the premise of the radical critics that art had an important moral and social function to fulfill. But it was exactly for this reason that the artist was obliged never to sacrifice the standards of art in the interest of social utility. For even in the terms of social utility, Dostoevsky insisted, "a production without artistic value can never and in no way attain its goal; indeed, it does more harm than good to the cause. Consequently, in neglecting artistic value the Utilitarians take the lead in harming their own cause."

There is then, in Dostoevsky's view, no conflict between the belief that art has a supremely important moral and social mission and a determination not to turn art into a medium of propaganda. This is exactly the position that an embattled Ralph Ellison has defended so eloquently and staunchly in his criticism. No contemporary American writer has made out a stronger case for the moral function of art than Ralph Ellison in such essays as "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity" and "Stephen Crane and American Fiction." These critical pieces locate the greatness of such writers

1 Later, in the 1860s, the idea that literature should serve only as an auxiliary in the battle for a better social world was codified into an aesthetic theory by N. G. Chernyshevsky. Chernyshevsky's theory became the basis of what is now considered the Marxist conception of art. Actually, it is the Russian radical conception; nothing in Marx himself required such a subordination or regimentation of art in the exclusive service of social struggle.

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as Twain and Melville in their incessant moral preoccupation with the basic injustices of American life (preeminently slavery and, more generally, the race problem). Ellison admires their attempts to cope with such injustices, not politically but morally. Among his own contemporaries, only Faulkner, in Ellison's view, has taken up this task, accepting and transcending the Southern stereotypes of his Negro characters and exploring the deep wounds inflicted on the Southern white psyche by the tangled history of its relations with the Negro.

While himself engaged in wrestling artistically with these very themes, Ralph Ellison has energetically rejected all efforts to confuse the function of art with that of social agitation. In an important exchange with Irving Howe, Ellison draws a clear line between the obligations of art and those of social action. "In his effort to resuscitate Wright," Ellison points out, "Irving Howe would designate the role which Negro writers are to play more rigidly than any Southern politician—and for the best of reasons. We must express 'black' anger and 'clenched militancy'; most of all we should not become too interested in the problems of the art of literature, even though it is through these that we seek our individual identities. And between writing well and being ideologically militant, we must choose militancy." To which Ellison retorts: "I think that the writer's obligation in a struggle as broad and abiding as the one we are engaged in, which involves not merely Negroes but all Americans, is best carried out through his role as a writer. And if he chooses to stop writing and take to the platform, then it should be out of personal choice and not under pressure from would-be managers of society."

I had read this exchange when it first appeared—in *Dissent* and *The New Leader* in 1963—and had written about it, upholding Ellison's position, in a review of *Shadow and Act* commissioned and accepted by *Partisan Review*. The piece, for some reason, was never published. I suspect that its disappearance may have had something to do with an idea expressed in the epigraph from Malraux that Ellison had appended to his reply to Howe: "What runs counter to the revolutionary convention is, in revolutionary histories, suppressed more imperiously than embarrassing episodes in private memoirs . . . ." In any case, it is impossible for me to read Ellison's words now without thinking of Dostoevsky's remarks on the advice given by the radical critic Dobrolyubov to the Russian poet I. S. Nikitin.

The descendant of a lowly merchant family, Nikitin was an admirer of Pushkin and an imitator of his lyrical style. Dobrolyubov found this taste deplorable, especially in view of Nikitin's class background; and the gist of his comments is summarized by Dostoevsky in the following fashion: "'Write about your needs' Nikitin is told, 'describe the needs and necessities of your condition, down with Pushkin, don't go into raptures over him, but go into raptures over this and over that and describe this and nothing else'—'But Pushkin has been my banner, my beacon, my master' cries Mr. Nikitin (or me for Mr. Nikitin). 'I am a commoner, he has stretched out his hands to me from where there is light, where spiritual enlightenment exists, where one is not stifled by outrageous prejudices, at least not like those in my milieu; he has been my spiritual food'—'You've gone wrong, and that's too bad! Write about the needs of your class,'" etc. This is the same sort of advice that Irving Howe was giving to Ralph Ellison: forget about T. S. Eliot, Malraux, Hemingway, Faulkner, Dostoevsky; write about the struggle of the Negro for civil rights, and look at Negro life *only* in relation to that all-important struggle.

What is involved here is much more than a quarrel over the role and function of art; it is really a disagreement about the range and dimension of human experience. No one knew this better than Dostoevsky, who refused to accept the reduction of possibility, the shrinking of the horizon of human concern, that lay at the root of the Russian radical doctrine of art. "The imagination builds castles in the air" Chernyshevsky had

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written with heavy sarcasm "when the dreamer lacks not only a good house, but even a tolerable hut." Hence a preoccupation with whatever transcends immediate physical and material need, or at best the concrete social issues of the moment, must be rejected as illusory and reprehensible. Dostoevsky replied to this position with a satirical skit in which he portrays a new contributor to a radical journal receiving instructions on how to toe the party line from the editors: "If a person," he is told, "says to you: I want to think, I torment myself with age-old problems that have remained unsolved; or, I want to live, I aspire to find a faith, I search for a moral ideal, I love art, or anything of this kind, always reply immediately, clearly, and without a moment's hesitation, that all this is stupidity, metaphysics, that all this is a luxury, childish dreams, senselessness . . . ."

Ralph Ellison again joins Dostoevsky at this point, but of course in the terms of his own special situation as a Negro-American writer. The white cultural world—especially those "friends" of the Negroes strongly influenced by Marxism-Leninism—has a tendency to insist that Negro experience in particular remain fixed within the confines laid down for human nature as a whole by Russian radical thought. But the Ralph Ellison who had written so touchingly about the ideal of "Renaissance man," cherished by himself and a few friends while they were growing up in Oklahoma, refused very early to accept any such limitations; and he has protested again and again when attempts have been made to impose it, or, even worse, when it has been accepted voluntarily. Indeed, Ellison's criticism of his close friend and erstwhile literary comrade-in-arms, Richard Wright, is precisely that after a certain point in his career Wright had tailored his creative imagination to such a pattern. Wright, Ellison remarked in an interview, "was committed to ideology—even though I, too, wanted many of the same things for our people." Fundamentally, he goes on, he and Wright had differed in their concept of the individual. "I, for instance, found it disturbing that Bigger Thomas (in Wright's *Native Son*) had none of the finer qualities of Richard Wright, none of the imagination, none of the sense of poetry, none of the gaiety. And I preferred Richard Wright to Bigger Thomas."

Ellison makes the same sort of argument in an article on Wright's *Black Boy,* where he directs his polemical fire against those critics who had wondered in print how a mind and sensibility such as Wright's could have developed amidst the appalling conditions of life, and the searing personal history, that he describes. These critics felt it to be a weakness in the book that no explanation was offered for this anomaly. Ellison retorts "that the prevailing mood of American criticism has so thoroughly excluded the Negro that it fails to recognize some of the most basic tenets of Western democratic thought when encountering them in a black skin. They forget that human life possesses an innate dignity and mankind an innate sense of nobility; that all men possess the tendency to dream and the compulsion to make their dreams reality; that the need to be ever dissatisfied and the urge ever to seek satisfaction is implicit in the human organism, and that all men are the victims and beneficiaries of the goading, tormenting, commanding and informing activity of that imperious process known as the Mind—the Mind, as Valery describes it, 'armed with its inexhaustible questions.'"

The final connection between Ralph Ellison and Dostoevsky that I wish to make concerns a certain similarity in the public status of their work and its relation to its audience. Dostoevsky has for so long been accepted as one of the dominating figures of world literature that it comes as something of a shock to realize how much hostility he encountered during his lifetime. His major novels were published in Russia at a time when liberal and radical opinion dominated among the intelligentsia; and each of his great works was ferociously attacked. (The inferior *A Raw Youth,* published in a left-wing journal, escaped such censure, while *Notes from Underground* was simply ignored.)

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For conservatives, who wished only to let sleeping dogs lie and to defend the existing regime at all costs, Dostoevsky's books were hardly consoling either; they were too probing and raised far too many fundamental questions. His novels really satisfied nobody's politics; but they imposed themselves by the sheer power and force of their art and the profundity of their vision.

Today, the spiritual descendants of the Russian radicals of the 1860s form the ruling class of Dostoevsky's homeland. The very ideas against which he fought lie at the heart of the social and cultural ideology they have imposed. The guardians of official Soviet culture are perfectly aware that the later Dostoevsky undermines all their most cherished dogmas. They would dearly like to get him out of the way, and even tried to do so during the heyday of Stalin. But Dostoevsky adds too much glory to Russian literature to be lightly discarded. The Soviets are now in the process of publishing a splendid collected edition of his works in thirty volumes, whose completion will constitute a remarkable achievement of Soviet scholarship. But most of the copies are sent abroad immediately, and those remaining in the Soviet Union are extremely difficult for the average citizen to procure. Until recently the later novels were rarely re-published, although the earlier (socialist-influenced) work came out in editions of several hundred thousand. On my last visit to a Russian bookstore, however, I became aware that the later novels are now also being re-published in cheap editions and in hundreds of thousands of copies. Dostoevsky is still a thorn in the flesh of the Soviet establishment, but he cannot simply be plucked out and thrown aside; his work refuses to be ignored or suppressed.

The position of Ralph Ellison in the United States is, happily, very different, and yet certain parallels exist all the same. *Invisible Man* was hailed as a masterpiece immediately on its publication, and Ralph Ellison's reputation has maintained its high stature through the intervening years. Yet, as the controversy with Irving Howe indicates, Ellison has come under fire for some of the same reasons that Dostoevsky was also assailed. During the turbulent 1960s, these attacks, launched by left-wing spokesmen for the new upsurge of black nationalism, mounted in frequency and ferocity. Ralph Ellison became the hated enemy against whom the new black nationalist literati felt it necessary to discharge their long pent-up resentment and rage. While he maintained a quiet dignity in the face of the storm, even managing to jest about it in conversation, he was deeply wounded by the unfair and intemperate charges leveled against him in print and in person when he appeared on the lecture platform.

The storm seems to have abated recently, though, and the wind to have shifted, if I am to judge by a thoughtful and informative article of John Wright in an issue of the *Carleton Miscellany* largely devoted to Ellison's work. Exactly as in the case of Dostoevsky, the power and profundity of his art have imposed themselves despite the onslaught of his ideological foes. It would even appear that some of those who had assailed Ellison most ferociously—not all, to be sure—have now begun to realize that the foundation of the new black American culture they are seeking has been laid down in his pages. In an excellent formulation, John Wright speaks of Ellison as "approaching Afro-American life through a psychology of survival and transcendence rather than through a psychology of oppression." Even Ellison's former opponents, he points out, now recognize him as providing "the new black literary radicals with a positive vision of black lifestyles as profoundly human and spiritually sustaining."

It is good to know that at least some of "Uncle Tom's children" (to borrow a phrase from Richard Wright), much more refractory and rebellious than Richard Wright could possibly have believed, have begun to see what they can learn about themselves from Ellison's clear-eyed and vibrantly appreciative vision of Negro-American life and culture. As happened with Dostoevsky, this vision proved too impressive to be dis-

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carded or neglected; it simply had to be assimilated, and the process of re-evaluation seems to be proceeding apace. As a result, a possibility once broached by Ellison is now well on its way to becoming a reality. "Perhaps," he remarked in his controversy with Howe, "if I write well enough the children of today's Negroes will be proud that I did, and so, perhaps, will Irving Howe's." The classic status now unanimously accorded to *Invisible Man* would indicate that this generous hope has come true.

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The mystery of Terpsichore: Balanchine, Stravinsky, and *Apollo*

by Eva Resnikova

In Paris in 1928, when classical dance was démodé, Balanchine created a ballet that prompted Diaghilev to remark at a rehearsal: "What he is doing is magnificent. It is pure classicism such as we have not seen since Petipa's."[1]

But Balanchine's *Apollo* was not a mere re-creation of Petipa classicism. It represented a new classical ballet style, one that would come to be called neoclassical. As always, music was Balanchine's inspiration—though he disliked the word, preferring to say that certain music "moved" him to try to make it visible.

The music that moved Balanchine most was Stravinsky's. In the case of *Apollo,* Stravinsky's music seems to have provided not only the impetus for a ballet but the basis for a personal manner—a modern classical style that was both to assure the survival of the danse d'école as a viable creative language and to provide a uniquely valid contemporary approach to the performance of the classical masterpieces of the past.

In his 1947 essay "The Dance Element in Stravinsky's Music,"[2] Balanchine describes Stravinsky's "calculated, dynamic use of silence" as one of the "living secrets" of his music: "A pause, an interruption, is never empty space between indicated sounds . . . . It acts as a carrying agent from the last sound to the next one." In musical terms, Balanchine is describing articulation, the separation that makes possible connection by providing junctures at which motifs or phrases may be joined.

Articulation assumes the status of subject matter in Stravinsky's *Apollo,* for the composer has identified the score's true subject as versification, especially what he called his "musical alexandrines." In *Dialogues and a Diary* he recounts that one of his first ideas for *Apollo* was a verse rhythm based on a Russian alexandrine by Pushkin, which became the cello solo with pizzicato accompaniment at no. 41 in Calliope's variation. The rest of the variation, which bears the subtitle "L'Alexandrine," was based on the French alexandrine by Boileau that serves as an epigraph: "Que toujours dans vos vers le sens coupant les mots / Suspende l'hémistiche et marque le repos"—an admonition to the would-be versifier always to "mark the rest" at the hemistich with a cesura. In *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents,* Robert Craft reveals that the composer initially wrote out the entire variation in scansion marks, without pitches, as if he were setting verse.

Aside from this very literal and self-conscious translation of prosody into musical rhythms, appropriate to the variation of the character whom Stravinsky describes in his *Autobiography* as the muse of "poetry and its

1 Nicolas Nabokov, *Bagázh,* Atheneum, 1975, p. 152

2 First published in *Dance Index,* Vol. 6 (1947), and widely reprinted since then, most recently in the Summer 1982 issue of *Ballet Review.*

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rhythm," the basic patterns throughout *Apollo* are dotted: the short-long of the iamb and the long-short of the trochee, which are often articulated with rests to form the twelve-syllable alexandrine line, as in the final measure of Calliope's variation, which consists of six articulated trochees in two measures of 9/8 (quarter note, sixteenth note, sixteenth rest). The prosody is, appropriately, classical, based on duration rather than stress; but the long note is also sometimes marked for a dynamic accent, as in the similar pattern of three articulated trochees in one measure of 3/4 in Polyhymnia's variation at one measure before no. 51 (eighth note, sixteenth note, sixteenth rest). Thus an important motif of *Apollo* is the small, articulated rhythmic pattern (iambic or trochaic) joined to form articulated phrases.

In *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven,* Charles Rosen identifies the "short, periodic, articulated phrase" as the "germinal force" of classicism in music and shows the latent possibility of the isolation and inflection of the individual beat in the classical phrase (in contrast to the nearly equal weight of each beat in the Baroque) to be the source of the "life and energy" of classical rhythm.[3] *Apollo* did, in fact, mark for Stravinsky a conscious return to classicism, the clue to which may be seen in his choice of a classical Greek subject, with its implied homage to Le Roi Soleil. This was lost on contemporary Parisian audiences, who castigated the composer of *Le Sacre du printemps* for creating such lightweight music, with its suggestions of Tchaikovsky and Delibes. For the young Balanchine, however, Stravinsky's score was "a revelation" in its "discipline and restraint," and the composer's "dynamic use of silence" was to have a profound effect on the choreographer's own developing style.

An artist does not consciously set out to devise a style; he discovers it in the very act of creation, which itself can proceed only from instinct (Balanchine: "I would see and I would smell what to do . . ."). But just as some styles are more conducive to the expression of certain things than of others, Stravinsky's music for *Apollo* was conducive to what, in hindsight, we must imagine to have been Balanchine's incipient style, one based, like the music, on rhythmic articulation applied to an inherited, traditional language.

A musical rest is an absence of sonority and can at most imply a presence. In dance, however, a rest is an absence of movement with an objective presence, a pose. Rests in dance are the primary means of drawing attention to accents. Whereas in music there are several means of accenting, in dance accenting is of duration only: there is no louder or softer in movement. There are variations in impetus, and accenting is often confused with attack, or the initial impulse of a movement. Thus the impetus of the straight-legged kick from fifth position known as grand battement is outward, but the accent—the emphasis of the movement corresponding to the musical downbeat—is in the final fifth position. Most movements in ballet are accented in fifth position (the feet completely crossed and touching), the most important in the ballet lexicon. It is the alpha and omega of the classical dance, the position from which all movement springs and to which it is inevitably and irresistibly drawn, as leading tone is to tonic. Accents most often draw attention to stability in ballet, a concept essential to its expression, as we shall see.

In ballet, accents are built into the steps and movements themselves, as they are built into words, and balletic accents are similarly invariable, in the sense that they are based on the principles that underlie the classi-

3 Though he does not elaborate, Rosen points out that the periodic phrase is related to the dance, "with its need for a phrase pattern that corresponds to the steps and to groupings"; and to illustrate the inflection of the individual beat in the classical phrase he chooses a dance form, minuets by Bach and Haydn. Rosen further notes that the phrasing of classical rhythm is that of dance music, and that "its large structures are these phrases dramatized."

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cal dance and are part of the definition of a movement. Balletic accents relate some movements and contrast others, determine how steps may be linked to form enchaînements and how they may be set to the upbeats and downbeats of the music. A choreographer may play with the viewer's expectations by accenting a movement differently, just as he may have a dancer flex a foot or turn in a leg; but for the classical choreographer these must be conscious artistic choices made for expressive purposes, as distinguished from misplaced or vague accents resulting from ignorance, which contradict the elegant logic from which the classical dance derives so much of its beauty and its meaning.

The aspects of Balanchine's manner that we associate with his neoclassical style derive from his articulation and emphasis of balletic accents and the phrasing he uses to achieve this more than from any other single factor. The Balanchine-trained dancer's famous potential for speed is one result: she is able to perform the most rapid allegro with elegance, for she never appears rushed. On the other hand, it imparts to adagio work the vitality of allegro, so that Balanchine's adagios never drag. It also leads the eye to focus on the full, classical positions rather than the infinite number of non-positions en route, which, with their flexed feet and half-bent knees, are not meant to be perceived, as an ill-timed dance photograph will reveal.

Most dancers are taught to phrase enchaînements—to hide the preparation and emphasize the jump in a glissade-assemblé, for example. But Balanchine enlarges and refines the concept of phrasing to include the very smallest, heretofore indivisible movements. It is, in fact, comparable to the inflection of the individual beat in the classical phrase, which Rosen identifies as the source of the life and energy of classical rhythm: "The clarity of the phrase is not only reflected in the total structure but at the lowest level of detail as well."

Consider one of the most basic movements in ballet, the battement tendu, which consists of two movements: the opening of the leg from fifth position until it is fully stretched with the toe pointed and resting on the floor (pointe tendue) and its closing back to fifth position. As battement tendu is commonly performed, the leg travels at a fairly constant rate of speed, reaching pointe tendue on the upbeat and fifth position on the count. At faster tempos the leg must increase its speed; at slower tempos it must decrease it. Balanchine, however, varies the impetus of the movement and holds the positions. In terms of musical notation, his phrasing would be described as a sforzando attack leaving fifth position followed by allegro or presto movement (depending on the tempo), a sudden rallentando, and a rest on the upbeat at pointe tendue. The closing reverses this, with a longer rest to mark the accent on the count. At slower tempos the speed of the leg is not decreased so much as the rests are proportionately lengthened, and at faster tempos the rests are proportionately shortened.

The English word "rest" is misleading—the Italian, French, and German "pause" would be more accurate—for the dancer does not relax during these suspensions of movement. An inner muscular tension must be maintained at all times so that the potential for movement is evident; otherwise the pose will appear lifeless. As Balanchine wrote of Stravinsky's music: "Life goes on within each silence."

Extraordinary legato is required to link the attack, rapid movement, deceleration, and rest, all performed within the split second required to open a leg. But legato in ballet is often confused with portamento, especially by the essentially Romantic ballerina. The contemporary prototype of this style is the Soviet defector Natalia Makarova, whose approach has had a tremendous influence on female dancing in the West, especially at American Ballet Theatre. In her *Dance Autobiography,* Makarova refers to this type of phrasing as "cantilena" and opposes it to Balanchine's "staccato." But legato and staccato are quantitative terms

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referring to degrees of separation, not vague notions of movement quality. The exaggerated drawing out of movements, especially at the excruciatingly slow tempos that Makarova favors in adagio, is a personal mannerism that has no basis in the logic of the classical dance.[4] The viewer is not meant to savor the leg's lingering at every point of its lifting and unfolding in développé; the position with the thigh raised to 135 degrees and the knee bent is not only unclassical but unlovely. A développé in four counts should have the leg completely unfolded on the first count, or at most the second, and held in the air for the duration of the phrase. No great skill is involved in taking a full four counts to unfold the leg; it is actually far more difficult to hold it extended at 135 degrees for three. As performed by Makarova, there is never any opportunity to have the fully blossomed développé engraved in one's visual memory, since by the time the music has reached "four," she has only just arrived and is off and running again, never coming to rest. The result of this Flying Dutchman school of adagio—for this viewer, at least—is a sensation not unlike *mal de mer*. More than anything, it resembles what Rosen calls the "horror of the void" of the High Baroque, in which "the *agréments* fill what empty space there was," and whose function he compares to that of decoration in Rococo interiors: "to hide the structure, to cover over the joints, to enforce a supreme continuity." Neoclassical decoration, on the other hand, was used "to emphasize structure, to articulate it, and to sharpen the spectator's sense of it." (Stravinsky: "I want the seams and sutures in my music to show."[5])

Because Balanchine was ballet master as well as choreographer, he was able to build his phrasing into his instruments at the same time as the basic movements and in the same way: by constant daily repetition, so that to do it differently would require conscious effort, like speaking one's mother tongue with a foreign accent. It is this fine-tuning that gives to the Balanchine-trained dancer the timbre by which we recognize her and distinguish her from all others. It is why a Balanchine dancer will always look like one, even when performing the choreography of others or practicing classroom combinations. In the view of some, this constitutes a limitation; but the truly limited dancer is the one with no style at all, or, what amounts to the same, an all-purpose, so-called flexible style. Balanchine training actually expands the range of the dance instrument, by imparting a technical mastery second to none and making possible clearly articulated movement at any speed.

The most crucial consequence of Balanchine's phrasing is that it allows his dancers always to remain on top of the beat, and thus allowed him to create choreography that is intricately and intimately related to the subtlest rhythmic nuances of the music. He emphasized this close relation by his concentration on a movement vocabulary that permits the most precise delineation of the music's rhythm, especially pointe work. For it is in the dancer's relationship with the floor that rhythm in dance is most clearly expressed. (The extreme example of this is tap dancing, and one should bear in mind Balanchine's admiration for Fred Astaire.) When the ballet de cour ascended to the proscenium stage in the late seventeenth century and acquired the dimension of height, the goal of the ballet (now called the danse d'élévation) became the conquering of gravity. But Balanchine, like Stravinsky, was strictly twentieth century: he was concerned with conquering time. "Stravinsky's strict beat," Balanchine wrote, "is his sign of authority over time," and the choreographer's greatest stimulus comes from placing "confidence without limit" in this control.

By attempting to conquer gravity, the dancer must surrender to time: a ballistic

4 "Welcome to Moscow, home of the classic ballet!" a Radio Moscow interviewer greeted Balanchine and his company on their first visit there, in 1962. "I beg your pardon," Balanchine replied. "Russia is the home of romantic ballet. The home of classic ballet is now America."

5 Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes*, Knopf, 1966, p. 25

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missile, once launched, is powerless to affect the course—and, most important, the duration—of its trajectory. Balanchine's terre-à-terre and skimming, élancé vocabulary ensures that his dancers are rarely so far from the floor that they cannot reach down and touch bottom at any given moment. They soar as well, but Balanchine's preferred method of flight is manned, and to this end he perfected the art of "invisible" partnering: one pictures the girls being lifted in slow, high arcs at the end of *The Four Temperaments,* or the long, low springs in arabesque in the opening pas de deux of *Chaconne,* in which the ballerina appears to be propelling herself forward with the tip of her toe. (The running high lift with the partner's arms outstretched is said to have been invented in Petrograd by the teenaged Balanchine, with his schoolmate Hilda Mungalova his guided missile en arabesque.)

Although a movement vocabulary is a stylistic choice, there are technical repercussions. The strength in pointe work that Balanchine's style demands is technically incompatible with big jumps and soft ballon, as practiced, respectively, by the Soviets, whose pointe work tends toward harshness, and the Danes, whose pointe work is weak and underdeveloped. This choice entails a musical trade-off as well. The romanticism of the Soviet style is evident in the dancer's continual resort to rubato; her time is elastic, stretched and shrunken at will according to her personal interpretation of the relationship of steps to music. (The French refusal to dance on the beat stems from coquetry rather than Slavic soulfulness.) The Danes dance more or less on the music during the enchaînements of small connecting steps and low beats that characterize the Bournonville style, but they time the jumps that punctuate them so that they reach the apex on the count and land slightly late, thus creating the illusion known as ballon, which is really a sort of rubato. The Balanchine dancer, on the other hand, lands squarely on the beat, or even slightly anticipates it. Whereas the Danish dancer, already late, has no time to hold the final position of the jump—the arabesque fondue in a grand jeté en avant, for example—the Balanchine dancer shows both the split in the air and the arabesque on the ground. This is more difficult than proceeding directly to another step, which allows the dancer to cover up a shaky or less than perfectly placed landing. (Erik Bruhn believes that Bournonville, in order to conceal his own brittle landings, arranged his variations so that a jump was seldom followed by a sustained pose.) But the logic of the classical dance requires that one show the recovery, as any viewer knows who has seen the effect of a perfect multiple pirouette or series of fouettés ruined by an unsteady finish; and tours en l'air are judged not by the turns in the air but by the fifth positions in which they begin and end.

The Balanchine dancer's ability to achieve stable and well-placed landings is more than a matter of demonstrating technical prowess; it is an essential element of balletic expression. The tension-producing instability of a balance on pointe, a spin, or a jump requires release and resolution in stability, as dissonance in tonal music requires resolution in consonance. Stability and instability in ballet are, in fact, analogous to consonance and dissonance in tonal music, which is to say its primary means of expression. But whereas notions of consonance and dissonance have changed dramatically over the centuries, stability and instability obey not the conventions of harmony but the laws of physics, most notably gravity.

Double work extends the vocabulary of instability by providing the dancer with an aid to balance that makes possible sustained precariousness and thus sustained expressivity. The Rose Adagio in *The Sleeping Beauty* is built on such sustained precariousness, employing four partners for the ballerina as she balances on pointe in attitude, supported by each in turn and holding the pose unsupported as the partners change. Balanchine, in his gloss on the Rose Adagio in *Rubies,* to Stravinsky's *Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra,* has the ballerina supported by four cavaliers at once, each grabbing a hand

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or foot, who manipulate her through the gamut of adagio positions as she stands on one pointe. The joke here is that what should be sustained precariousness becomes sustained stability. (The blasé expression on her face, in contrast to the usual barely concealed terror behind Aurora's frozen smile, is probably not part of the choreography, but it helps.)

Controlled instability can also be used as an element of an individual performing style. Much of the excitement of Suzanne Farrell's dancing stems from her skirting of disaster, for she often seems to throw herself into positions on pointe with little regard for whether she will be able to recover her balance, particularly when she has the safety net of a partner. But even on her own she has a remarkable ability to redress at the last moment from an off-center position on pointe, especially in pirouettes, which produces an effect similar to that of a trill resolving to a cadence.

Though instability is the primary means of creating dissonance in classical ballet, there are other means of creating gestural dissonance in dance. Nijinsky dispensed entirely with the vocabulary of the danse d'école in *L'Après-midi d'un faune*: there is no pointe work, there are no leaps or pirouettes. But there is a continuous tension created by the torsion of the body demanded by his pseudo-Greek style: torso facing front, head and feet facing sideways. This tension is released only in the final moment of the ballet, in a literal sexual gesture. Far from being gratuitous, as many contemporary critics felt, it seems almost the only possible response.

When Balanchine choreographed music in which tonality does not play its traditional role, he often employed torsioned positions in combination with balletic instability. The enormous build-up of tension in the *Agon* pas de deux derives from both instability and torsion, reflecting the mix of tonal and atonal elements in the music. Instability is carried to such a degree in this modern mating dance that it engenders an element of danger, as in a high-wire act: Supported by one hand in a deep arabesque penchée on pointe, will she fall when her partner drops to the floor on his back? Thus acrobatics (from the Greek *akrobatein,* to walk on the tips of the toes) is not mere technical display but an essential expressive element of the classical dance.

It was just such acrobatics that proved a stumbling block to many viewers at the beginning of Balanchine's career, among them that champion of classicism André Levinson, who pronounced himself "shocked" by the "angular attitudes" and "acrobatic velleities" of *Apollo,* which seemed to him to be nothing but "gratuitous jokes."[6] Yet Levinson also remarked on a moment he found to be of singular beauty: that point in the pas d'action at which the young god stands facing the audience with arms outstretched and supporting the three muses arrayed in front of him in arabesque penchée—the same moment, incidentally, that had prompted Diaghilev's remark on Balanchine's classicism quoted at the beginning of this article.

It took some thirty years for *Apollo* to be generally recognized as a masterpiece. Twenty years after that Balanchine decided to revise his masterpiece, effectively eliminating the narrative element by cutting the prologue depicting Apollo's birth and the ascent to Parnassus in the apotheosis. Many critics interpreted his actions as a gratuitous joke, or worse: one even went so far as to label Balanchine's treatment of his ballet a "violent act" that called into question the very nature of the Stravinsky-Balanchine relationship. The choreographer had already attempted to explain himself in a 1981 interview in *Dance Magazine*:

> I know people were upset. But they never saw the original *Apollo*—they weren't even born when I made it . . . . You see, all of that is unimportant. What is important is the dancing . . . only the dancing. Pas de deux, variation, coda . . . that's important. So I changed. I know

6 André Levinson, *Les Visages de la danse,* Grasset, 1933, p. 34

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that people were screaming and saying, "Oh, he's changed it! It was so beautiful! *Why* did he change it?" But I know why I changed it. I took out all the garbage—that's why.

One person who might have understood was Balanchine's old friend Stravinsky. Had the composer still been with us, no doubt Balanchine would have asked him to re-arrange his score as a suite de danses ("pas de deux, variation, coda"), and, considering Stravinsky's track record (*Petrushka* suite, *Pulcinella* suite, no fewer than three *Firebird* suites, *Divertimento* from *Le Baiser de la fée,* et al.), it is likely that he would have complied. After all, it was he who, when asked by Diaghilev about the "argument" of his *Apollo,* had replied that there was none, and that this was "the key to the mystery of Terpsichore."[7] By taking out the "garbage," Balanchine has fully revealed to us this mystery of classicism renewed, whose rites his dancer-deities continue to re-enact for us on the stage.

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7 Interview in *Candide,* June 6, 1935 (quoted in *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents,* Simon & Schuster, 1978).

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The case of Roy Campbell
by Robert Richman

Of many selves we all possess
My meanest has the most persisted . . .

A shifty and insidious ghost,
Of all my selves he is the one,
Though it's with him I meet the most,
I'd go the longest way to shun . . . .

Within his heart, so chilled and squamous,
He knows I've but to sell my pride
To make him safe, and rich, and famous;
And he would fatten if I died.
—Roy Campbell, in "Reflections"

For the biographer or critic, there can be few tasks less appealing than the rehabilitation of a universally despised writer. At the very least there is always the risk that the odium heaped upon the writer in his lifetime will rub off on the author of anything written in his defense after his death. In the case of the South African poet Roy Campbell, who forged an uneasy place for himself on the London literary scene between the two World Wars, any reconsideration is made all the more difficult by the atrociousness of the poet's beliefs, the waywardness of his actions, the general disarray of his life, and the perversity of his character. It was all this and more that prompted Stephen Spender—Campbell's foremost literary and political enemy—to denounce him categorically in 1946, when the antagonisms of the prewar years were once again being revived with a new intensity. In a private letter to Campbell, written in June of that year, Spender spoke of him as an "infamous slander[er] . . . a liar . . . an empty-headed boaster, a coward, a bully and a Fascist."[1]

A few days later Spender's review of Campbell's *Talking Bronco* in the weekly *Time and Tide* pronounced a similar judgment: ". . . with Mr. Campbell," Spender wrote, "we are face to face with something that puzzles us everywhere—a mixture of pretentiousness, violence, glamour, cruelty and ignobleness." The immediate cause of Spender's outburst was the poem that gave *Talking Bronco* its title. In this poem, Campbell created a figure called MacSpaunday. This was clearly an acronym for the circle of left-wing writers—MacNeice, Spender, Auden, and C. Day Lewis—that had dominated the literary scene in the Thirties, all of whom Campbell accused of having written Communist propaganda for financial gain. Spender's response to this attack was not merely an expression of personal rancor, however—though there was plenty of rancor in it. His words also expressed nearly twenty years of literary London's collective hatred of Roy Campbell.

But if Roy Campbell has passed into liter-

1 The letter is quoted in Peter Alexander's *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography,* Oxford University Press, 277 pages, $27.95. Peter Alexander is also the editor of *The Selected Poems of Roy Campbell,* Oxford University Press, 131 pages, $19.95.

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ary history as a villain, it is not due solely to the prejudices of his enemies on the Left. He himself played the largest part in his downfall. He was, after all, an active supporter of fascist causes, an outspoken racist, and a sworn enemy of democracy. His hatred of blacks, Jews, and "Bolshies" had disfigured much of his poetry and his two prose autobiographies, *Broken Record* and *Light on a Dark Horse.* Like Hemingway he was an aficionado of bullfighting, soldiering, and guns ("the smell of cordite, next to that of carnations," he wrote, "is the most exciting perfume in the world"), and he combined these tastes with a showy masculinity that, again like Hemingway, was often the mask of an uncertain virility. Stalking London in a toreador's cap and cloak, as he did in his later years, and boasting, in *Broken Record,* of writing only in red ink, Campbell often behaved as if he were little more than a figure in a disagreeable literary farce.

The question that needs to be asked about Campbell is not whether he was in many respects a repugnant and repulsive character. Of this there can be little doubt. The question is whether there is anything left in the wreckage of his career worth saving. In the twenty-five years since his death in a car crash in Portugal, his work has been very little read. Indeed, if Campbell is remembered at all today, it is for his translations of Baudelaire and St. John of the Cross. The publication of Peter Alexander's two books marks the first attempt in many years to revive interest in his life and work. Alexander, a South African scholar now living in New Zealand, has clearly set out to rehabilitate this most notorious of his literary countrymen. It must be said that he does not really succeed in this endeavor. But the story he tells is an interesting one, despite his special pleading on Campbell's behalf. Along the way he reminds us of what it was that constituted Roy Campbell's appeal in the first place. Whether this will spark a revival of interest in Campbell's poetry remains to be seen. The obstacles, after all, are formidable.

"My ancestors," Campbell wrote in *Broken Record,* "cleared out of Britain at the first whiff of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." Campbell believed it was to his distance from what he considered the poisonous progressive culture of modern Europe that he owed his happy childhood. He certainly did not loathe his parents in the manner so familiar to us in the lives of the Englishmen of his generation. His mother seems never to have failed him, and his father, a wealthy Durban doctor, "spoiled" his young son by the remarkable device of establishing an open account for him at the local bookshop. Though Campbell did not do well in school, he took to drawing and poetry at an early age. He was not the accomplished athlete he boasted of being in his memoirs. (He was not many of the things he boasted of being.) He was more aesthete than athlete in fact. But already idealizing the life of action, he tried, at sixteen, to run off to war. His mother caught him before he could board the train.

Two years later Campbell left Durban for Oxford, hoping to pass Responsions (the first of three examinations required for the B.A. degree) in Greek and enter the university. He failed, and took the blow badly. He did not fail, however, to adopt the fashionable tastes of the day, among them heavy drinking, floppy hats, homosexuality, left-wing politics, and *Wheels,* the literary magazine of the Sitwells. In a letter at the time, he grandly declared:

> We have passed the ages of Romanticism, Parnassianism and Symbolism. We have come to the age of Psycho-Analysis—futurism.

Though nearly all of these tastes—except for drinking and homosexuality—would be modified or abandoned, Campbell's attraction to Oxford's bohemian life was not simply another passing phase. It was consistent with his idea of himself as a superior outsider. Campbell professed to detest mediocrity and was therefore thoroughly at home with the bohemians' scorn for the mundane values of the middle class. Once Campbell

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realized that the bohemians merely substituted their own brand of mediocrity for that of the middle class, he turned on them too. Recalling, in *Broken Record,* a trip to Paris in 1919, Campbell observed that "[e]verybody was his own genius," and that he

> had the impression of a vast communal conspiracy to dirty and destroy all that is vertical, clear, or distinguished in human or artistic values [and] qualities that were within everybody's reach, naïveté, skittishness, naughtiness, and affectation were exalted, as faith, enthusiasm, and reverence were debased.

Such sentiments did not prevent Campbell from acquiring a taste for the poetry of the French decadents, however, and, more importantly, the poetry of Paul Valéry, whose *Charmes* provided him with a model for his later lyric poems.

In 1922, Campbell married Mary Garman, who was to remain his wife until his death. Mary, a beautiful, masculine, and strong-willed woman, picked up Campbell in a London restaurant; and it was she who, for the rest of their lives together, directed the household, paid the bills, and had most of the affairs—in her case, lesbian affairs. Peter Alexander writes that in "the early stages of their married life Campbell suffered a good deal from jealousy" over Mary's past "friendships" with women, and Campbell made his wife suffer too. On one occasion he held her out of a window in his arms, threatening to let her drop three stories to the ground. Campbell's jealous rages notwithstanding, Mary's sexual character must have somehow appealed to Campbell's own sexual uncertainties. In an unpublished section of *Light on a Dark Horse,* he spoke frankly of "my awful physical shyness of girls, which has been the bugbear of my existence."

In a converted cowshed the Campbells called home, located three miles outside the Welsh village of Aberdaron, Campbell composed *The Flaming Terrapin* (1924), the long, book-length poem that established his fame. He was only twenty-three.

> The Ark is launched; cupped by the streaming breeze,
> The stiff sails tug the long reluctant keel,
> And Noah, spattered by the rising seas,
> Stands with his great fist fastened to the wheel.
> Like driven clouds, the waves went rustling by,
> Feathered and fanned across their liquid sky,
> And, like those waves, the clouds in silver bars
> Creamed on the scattered shingle of the stars . . .

The poem uses the Noah legend as the basis for a tale of the earth's regeneration after a great disaster. Its extraordinary exuberance and linguistic richness brought its young author considerable acclaim. The Irish poet AE wrote that he knew of no other writer who had mastered "such a savage splendour of epithet or could marry the wild word with the wild thought." Edward Garnett and other reviewers praised it in similar terms. Desmond MacCarthy also admired it. The book had been published by the prestigious firm of Jonathan Cape at the suggestion of Augustus John and T. E. Lawrence. (Campbell had sat for John when the poet was nineteen; a reproduction of the portrait adorns the jacket of Peter Alexander's biography.)

The poem was not without flaws, of course. Its governing idea is only loosely integrated with the poem's verbal felicities. Metaphor functions strictly as a medium of speed and rhythm, and Campbell's alertness to color and sound is similarly divorced from the poem's intellectual substance. Most important, the poem is overburdened by the weight of its legend-theme; its relevance to the modern world seems questionable at best. But readers of the time responded to the poem's direct—indeed, almost unmediated—expression of Campbell's electric personality. The South African poet's lush world, galvanized by a distinctive and exotic vitality, seemed, as one critic put it, a breath of fresh air for a demoralized postwar England. "The Terrapin," wrote Campbell in a letter to his parents, "is the symbol of masculine energy." There were apparently readers enough who agreed.

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Following the success of *The Flaming Terrapin,* Campbell returned to South Africa a celebrity. One of the first things he was asked to do was give a speech to the home folk. Campbell agreed, and proceeded to praise Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and D. H. Lawrence. He dismissed the war as a piece of "sentimental hysteria," and he called the province of Natal a "grocer's paradise." His imprudent tongue deeply shocked his conservative audience. Scarcely a week went by without one scandal or another. When Campbell founded the literary review *Voorslag* ("Whiplash") with William Plomer, they promised to "sting with satire the mental hindquarters of the bovine citizenry of the Union." Campbell kept the promise. He relentlessly chided the South Africans for everything from the "fetish that rules the country—colour prejudice," to their literary criticism, which was said to be "either in its infancy or in its dotage." Campbell resigned after just three issues, following squabbles with the furious backers as well as with Plomer, whom Campbell accused of wanting to start a colonial outpost of Bloomsbury. (He probably wasn't wrong about that.) "The Freudianised Boer," said Campbell apropos his break with Plomer, "is a dismal figure." Campbell left South Africa, licking his wounds, in December 1926, only two and a half years after his return there.

In the final days before his departure Campbell penned his parting shot at South Africa, a satire called "The Wayzgoose" that successfully combines arrogance and good humor about his disenchantment with his native land.

> Attend my fable if your ears be clean,
> In fair Banana Land we lay our scene—
> South Africa, renowned both far and wide
> For politics and little else beside.

In England once again, Campbell settled into what would become a fixed habit—reversing his opinions on everything. In London, blacks were now transformed from oppressed, mistreated heroes to hypochondriacal, servile, demanding crybabies. South Africa was no longer a boorish, culturally philistine hellhole but a beautiful, sane, and sorely missed paradise. Campbell's systematic alienation from wherever he happened to be at the moment enabled him to see himself as a perpetual victim. This in turn prompted him to adopt whatever attitudes he felt were necessary to the combative self-defense of the outsider. Plomer understood this bizarre psychology when he wrote: "It was as if he felt he had to make enemies in order to see himself as a victim and at the same time a hero—or almost as a martyr and a saint."

The volume *Adamastor,* published in 1930, contained many of the poems Campbell wrote while still in South Africa. "To a Pet Cobra," written in 1926, is one of his first serious experiments with the theme of self-martyrdom and self-glorification.

> There is no joy like theirs who fight alone,
> Whom lust or gluttony have never tied,
> Who in their purity have built a throne,
> And in their solitude a tower of pride.

A month later Campbell wrote "Tristan da Cunha," which explores the same subject with admirable self-restraint and with a greater command of poetic artifice.

> Exiled like you and severed from my race
> By the cold ocean of my own disdain,
> Do I not freeze in such a wintry space,
> Do I not travel through a storm as vast
> And rise at times, victorious from the main,
> To fly the sunrise at my shattered mast? . . .
>
> We shall not meet again; over the wave
> Our ways divide, and yours is straight and endless,
> But mine is short and crooked to the grave:
> Yet what of these dark crowds amid whose flow
> I battle like a rock, aloof and friendless,
> Are not their generations vague and endless
> The waves, the strides, the feet on which I go?

When the poem was first published in the

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New Statesman, T. S. Eliot wrote a letter to the magazine (published on October 22, 1927) praising Campbell for his "remarkable mastery of meter and language." Thus began an important friendship for Campbell, the immediate result of which was the publication of *Adamastor* under Eliot's Faber imprint. The book, certainly one of Campbell's best, contained many of the "African" poems that would eventually find their way into W. B. Yeats's *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* and Philip Larkin's *Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse.* Even though Campbell already had a reputation as an obnoxious show-off and gadfly, the book was generally praised. Desmond MacCarthy called it a book destined to be famous. Arnold Bennett hailed Campbell as a "master of words." In America, Allen Tate declared it "a distinguished book."

Campbell's return to England, alas, was not as happy as the reviews that greeted *Adamastor.* In August 1927, the Campbells, having been befriended by Harold Nicolson, were offered the gardener's cottage at Long Barn, the Nicolson residence, free of rent. It was, according to James Lees-Milne, Nicolson's biographer, "a disastrous move," for the Campbells "would bring them much distress . . . repay their hospitality with hostility and . . . give unwelcome publicity to their sexual predilections." In a matter of weeks Mary Campbell and Vita Sackville-West (Nicolson's wife) began a protracted affair that, according to both Peter Alexander and James Lees-Milne, devastated Campbell. After some ugly scenes, Mary (who by this time had already borne two daughters) finally returned to Campbell, although she would harbor strong romantic feelings toward Vita for some years afterward and write her imploring, explicit letters. It is hard to believe that Campbell was entirely surprised by this affair, however. That the Nicolsons were both homosexuals was well known to their literary friends, and only a dullard could have construed an invitation to Long Barn as a gesture of disinterested generosity toward a bright young poet. Peter Alexander reminds us that Campbell and his wife were "a strikingly handsome pair." Nicolson, to begin with, did not feel let down. After listening to Campbell's account of his life he proclaimed him "another Rimbaud." At any rate, Campbell, as his biographer writes, "had to adjust to the idea of a wife who was no longer wholly his . . . [and] Mary had to adjust to the idea of a husband who needed her more than she needed him." "It is hardly coincidental," Alexander adds, "that Campbell in several poems referring to the period calls Mary his 'sister.'"

Campbell's revenge and public martyrdom over the Sackville-West affair once again took the form of a poem, this time a dismal satire called "The Georgiad." Like "The Wayzgoose," it is an attempt to cause pain to his enemies. Yet because Campbell felt genuinely desperate about Mary, and somehow inferior to his reviled subjects, the satire fizzles.

> It was a voice of 1930 model
> And in Bloomsbury accent it could yodel
> Between its tonsils drawling out long O's
> Along its draughty, supercilious nose:
> Or coo in satire gentle and polite
> To fill the soul of Humbert with delight . . .
> His voice thus tried, our hero turns about
> And in the mirror, with a joyful shout,
> Seeing his new physique, decides to patènt
> The whole machine, in which, so far from latent,
> Both sexes rampantly dispute the field
> And at alternate moments gain or yield.
> This was no neuter of a doubtful gender,
> But both in him attained their fullest splendour,
> Unlike our modern homos, who are neither,
> He could be homosexual with either
> And heterosexual with either, too—
> A damn sight more than you or I could do!

By reversing himself about his own homosexuality, the poem becomes an act of self-denial; by ill-using his poetic gifts (Campbell himself later called the poem "coarse, swinging doggerel") Campbell made his

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poem an act of self-destruction as well. Predictably, Campbell's enemies were delighted by its failure.

In the spring of 1928, publicly humiliated by Mary's betrayal of him, Campbell was once again off and running, this time to Martigues in Provence. Campbell wrote pathetic letters begging Mary to join him. Much to his surprise, she did, arriving in the small port town in May with the couple's two daughters. But Mary's return scarcely represented an affirmation of their love. She returned only because Vita Sackville-West's interest in her had fallen away. Along with pursuing a literary career, Sackville-West was at the time carrying on no less than five other affairs.

Whatever the underlying reality, Mary did return, and the period of calm that ensued enabled Campbell to write some of his most serene and technically accomplished poems. In many of them, the exotic element is replaced by the first hints of his growing interest in Christianity. Like T. S. Eliot's entry into the Anglican Church a year earlier, Campbell's turn toward Christianity was an attempt to escape, through religious faith, what he deemed to be the harsh realities of the modern world. And again, like Eliot, it was also an attempt to transcend a disastrous marriage. The religious imagery in the exquisite sonnet "Mass at Dawn" (written in 1929 and included in *Adamastor*) suggests that Campbell was abandoning his earlier stance of fierce and proud isolation for the "cool planes" where the possibility of companionship exists:

> I dropped my sail and dried my dripping seines
> Where the white quay is chequered by cool planes
> In whose great branches, always out of sight,
> The nightingales are singing day and night.
> Though all was grey beneath the moon's grey beam,
> My boat in her new paint shone like a bride,
> And silver in my baskets shone the bream:
> My arms were tired and I was heavy-eyed,
> But when with food and drink, at morning-light,
> The children met me at the water-side,
> Never was wine so red or bread so white.

During this period Campbell also returned to the theme of isolation, but the terms and tone are much more temperate and lucid than they had ever been. This development may well derive from the new peace he had forged with Mary, whose calm, often impassive, image appears again and again in the sonnets written in Provence.

> When gathering vapours climb in storm
> The steep sierras of delight,
> Wings of your hair I love to form
> And on its perfume soar from sight.
> For in those great black plumes unfurled
> The darkest condor of my thought
> May stretch his aching sinews taut
> And fling his shadow on the world.
> When sick of self my moods rebel,
> The demon from his secret hell,
> The eagle from his cage of brass,
> They have been lent such scented wings
> Over the wreck of earthly things
> In silence with the sun to pass.

The sharp and pure language of "Wings" is representative of the entire volume *Flowering Reeds,* published in 1933. It is Campbell's best book. Not only is the poet's mastery of language at its peak in this collection; he also displays a wider emotional scale. The sureness and self-reliance of tone that Campbell had perfected in *Adamastor* is contrasted in many of the poems of *Flowering Reeds* by new doubts and hesitations. With an unexpected and disturbing self-awareness, Campbell begins to elaborate in verse the truth of his own deeply divided nature.

Before tracing the way this divided nature expresses itself in *Flowering Reeds,* however, we must first look at the other book Campbell published in the same year: his first prose autobiography, *Broken Record.* In it, Campbell gives free rein to his deepest and darkest prejudices. The result is some fairly repellent reading.

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Whoever invented the word 'rights,' especially conjugal 'rights,' should have been passed through the Inquisition, which after all had its beneficial uses . . . it has no meaning at all, but only a vague, infectious, hypnotic effect on Saxons, Jews and Quakers, who would sooner fight for their 'rights' than for a living idea, or a person, or a King . . . .

I am all on the side of the natural human relationship of slave and master. No colour feeling ever existed until slavery was abolished. . . .

I disagree with Plomer's ideas about Rhodes, as I have always disagreed with him about the criminality of the whites. If one wants to make sensations about that sort of thing, Saxon America is the place to go, with its lynchings, etc. . . .

The clinical attitude penetrates into every branch of thought. From the amount of advertisements dealing with dyspepsia, bad-breath, smelly arm-pits, flat feet, blenorrhoea, piles, obesity, constipation, varicose veins, etc., one's first idea of London is as an enormous hospital ward; and the idea of illness and disease as the normal state becomes patent in everything from quack medicines to literature. The idea is generally spread by Jews or Quakers who accept the idea of original sin, and uncleanness, physically, morally, and intellectually, as far as it concerns the white man. The biggest anti-white alarmist bureau in London is run by a well-meaning Jew and a crowd of Quakers. Passionately negrophile and misanthropic at the same time, it publishes anything that would dirty the reputation of the white man, whether it comes from the side of fanatical over-domesticated bourgeois or from the far more powerful Jewish submarine torpedoes. I am no pogromite myself. One can forgive the Jews anything for the beauty of their women, which makes up for the ugliness of their men. But I fail to see how a man like Hitler makes any "mistake" in expelling a race that is intellectually subversive as far as we are concerned: that has none of our visual sense, but a wonderful dim-sighted instinct for dissolving, softening, undermining, and vulgarising.

"Dissolving, softening, undermining, and vulgarising" were, Campbell goes on to say, the hateful products of the twentieth century's two characteristic forms of government: Communism and democracy. Campbell made little distinction between the two. Both, he felt, were based on the corrupting ideas of egalitarianism and moral relativism, and both encouraged the mediocrity he so detested. The "tragic symbol of the Decline of the West," Campbell wrote in *Broken Record,* was—astonishingly—Charlie Chaplin, who "sneaked into the most august and sacred places, and stood picking his nose in the middle of Western culture." For Campbell, Chaplin represented Western civilization's death wish. He derided power, authority, and faith, and he embodied all the "poisonous" intellectual trends of the modern era, from Freud's legitimization of the son's wish to usurp the father to the democratic idea that all men—Jew, black, and white—are created equal.

It is worth recalling, in this context, that around the time that Campbell was giving the world these reflections, T. S. Eliot was expressing some very similar views on liberal democracy and its culture in the lectures he was delivering at the University of Virginia under the title *After Strange Gods.* (These were published in 1934, and never reprinted.) It may be that in an observation Eliot offers us in this work we shall find a key to the contradictions that divided Campbell in his work of this period, and probably through his entire career. Eliot is commenting on the differences (as he then saw them) between poetry and prose:

> I should say that in one's prose reflexions one may be legitimately occupied with ideals, whereas in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality.

Nothing could better state the distinction between the hateful "ideals" that are upheld in *Broken Record* and the actuality that is reflected in *Flowering Reeds.* Indeed, in Campbell's case the difference between the two kinds of expression is so great that he

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often seems hopelessly at odds with himself.

What makes this split literary personality even more curious is Campbell's complete awareness of it in *Flowering Reeds* and complete suppression of it in *Broken Record.* In a poem called "The Gum Trees" from *Flowering Reeds,* Campbell uses the image of an avenue lined on opposite sides by trees that initially seem to merge in the distance.

> Far on the sky, with crests aflame,
> The tapering avenues unite,
> And to a single target aim
> The keen velocities of sight . . .

But the "impetus their beauty breeds" towards the blissful peace of "some less transitory world" is only fleeting. By stanza thirteen we read:

> But as the gloom around them fades,
> The old hallucination flees,
> They swiften through the rushing shades
> Their endless marathon of trees;
>
> The winds they wrestled with are thrown,
> The miles they trekked are spurned and dead,
> But there before the blazing throne
> They blacken into shapes of dread,
>
> And on and on without control
> Still in the same direction tread:
> They, too, have dreamed they sought a goal
> When merely from themselves they fled!

By the end of the poem, with early hope now revealed as an "hallucination," the poet blithely accepts his fate.

> Their giant skeletons of shade
> Are blackly charred upon the eye,
> In motley rags of gloom arrayed
> They wear the scorn of earth and sky.
>
> The dusty winds begin to sweep,
> The distance stretched before them lies,
> Antaeus-like from caves of sleep
> Their old antagonists arise.

The somber sonnet "The Secret Muse" also deals with Campbell's painfully divided self.

> Between the midnight and the morn,
> To share my watches late and lonely,
> There dawns a presence such as only
> Of perfect silence can be born.

If anything forced Campbell's muse into hiding, it was the bitter foe within himself.

Broken Record also focuses on Campbell's abiding hatred of poets and literary men. His aversion became so profound that Campbell claimed it as the reason he fled to Provence. Not only was the region bereft of writers, but Campbell himself would not gain glory there as one. Instead, he would be loved, he writes in *Broken Record,* "due entirely to my prowess with horses and cattle. . . ." In later poems Campbell would complain often of what he called the "rabies of the brain" and—the title of one of his poems—"The Virus of Literacy." This is the man who spent so many hours of his youth in the Durban bookstore.

But Campbell's greatest attack on his literary side in *Broken Record* takes the form of ruthless excision: nearly all of it is left out. Instead, we are treated to Campbell's feats of strength, his running with bulls, battling with pythons, shooting buck, and so on, all carefully, often beautifully, rendered. At one point in *Broken Record* he interrupts a disquisition on shooting to ask: "What has all this got to do with my progression as a poet?" He answers:

> Everything. My eye, even shooting an antelope at five hundred yards, ordered the sinew in my arm and finger to see, to design, to trigger, to fire, to kill: and it ordered my other members too . . . . If I like Cervantes and Camoens apart from other poets [it is because] they are both soldiers and their images are not literary . . . . There is nothing, no difference at all, between a verb and an act.

Clearly, Campbell's "prose" side cannot talk about poetry—indeed, anything—without resorting to the rhetoric of action and violence; all is reflexes, muscles, killing. There

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is no difference between a verb and an act.

When Campbell and his wife and two daughters moved to Spain in 1933 he was more estranged from the literary community than ever. He was also without money, and without prospects for getting any. All he possessed was an extremely fragile marriage. The political confrontation that was brewing in his newly adopted country offered him yet another cause. When Campbell and his wife converted to Catholicism in 1934—a move, one would think, in the direction of serenity—it turned out to solidify Campbell's growing political commitment. To be a Catholic in these circumstances was to be political.[2] Perhaps Campbell knew this. At any rate, it came home to him quickly enough when in 1936 his confessor was shot dead on the street and he himself was severely beaten by left-wing Assault Guards. However justified Campbell's fury about these incidents was, it had an adverse effect on the poems he wrote during this period, which were published in a volume called *Mithraic Emblems* (1936).

> I never felt such glory
> As handcuffs on my wrists.
> My body stunned and gory
> With toothmarks on my fists . . . .
>
> And four of those Red bastards
> To hold one wounded man
> To all the staring rabble
> Proclaiming thus my clan.
> ("In Memoriam of 'Mosquito'")

These lines are actually some of the better ones in the book. Most of the poems suffer from an obscure religious symbolism that seems oddly disconnected from the feelings the poems contend with. Yet others—"Christ in Uniform," "Hot Rifles," "Junction of Rails—Voice of the Steel"—show a brutal realism, in which "holy excaliburs" will cleanse Spain of Communists.

Campbell's mixture of militarism and Catholicism appears again, at interminable length, in "Flowering Rifle," the epic-length poem about Spain published in 1939. Campbell is no longer content, as he says in another poem from this period, to "go stark: and let my meanings show." But this does not mean that he will state his faith, or even assert it; he wishes to impose it, along with a number of other things, and the result is a mania of purification that is truly terrifying.

> The hatred of the Cross is their Disaster,
> Than the great flood, a cataclysm vaster:
> Thinking to tear it down they tore the Sky,
> A rain of blood, and lightning from on high,
> And the great thunder, headlong and terrific,
> When Abel stretched his length to the Pacific,
> The land a murder, and the wind a cry:—
> And hence a War *for* War, to the last breath,
> The Sword he came to bring, the Sword of Death!
> No "War-to-end-War" (and beget ten more!)
> To "fight for Peace," the Babylonian Whore,
> The turtle-winged Sow that comes to farrow
> Blood baths for which the ocean is too narrow;
> A war for eagles—not for turtle-doves
> Henpecked to bleeding corpses by their loves!
> A war for warriors, not for pacifists
> To tear the living womb with gory fists
> Who rape, castrate, and torture, and deplore
> With uplifted hands the very name of War!
> And well may they abominate the Sword,
> The bared and naked vengeance of the Lord—
> And curse the Soldier, his, the human brand,
> That came to lop the sacrilegious Hand,
> The root of godless vermin from the land.

This is a writer out of control. In Campbell's five-thousand-word poem not one of his obsessions is omitted.

2 It was also a release from the couple's tormented sexual lives. In his memoir *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning,* the British poet Laurie Lee gives this vivid description of the newly converted Mary Campbell: "And in her, for the first time, I saw the banked up voluptuousness of a young and beautiful convert, holding to this single passion in which all hungers were answered and all doubts quietly put away. Here, romantic love was kept on ice, sealed by an unfaltering spiritual flame, and accompanied by a vocabulary of torment, physical denial and ecstasy which promised an eternity of sensuous reward . . . ."

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> But the old world is "braver" than the "new."
> Can use it as its foot-stool or its shoe:
> Or when it rots as it's begun to do,
> As a sharp knife can cut that Stilton through,
> Cough though the scientist or squirm the Jew,
> Or stink, abjectly dead, the poets too.

None of these lines, by the way, is included in Peter Alexander's excerpt of the poem in the new *Selected Poems,* yet they are essential to our understanding of it. Alexander's fifty-five-line excerpt is perhaps the only sustained passsage in the entire poem that is somehow inoffensive, and it leaves the reader with the impression that Campbell had written nothing more than a rather bland version of *The Flaming Terrapin.* But Alexander omits the offending lines for good reason: for the reader who is unable to share any of Campbell's perversity, the rhyming couplets fall into a dreary hum. Gone is Campbell's exacting attention to the shape of lines and sound of words, the hallmarks of *Adamastor* and *Flowering Reeds.* In place of the vitality that characterized *The Flaming Terrapin* and the "African" poems is a blatant litany of revenge, a fervor to destroy the objects of the poet's hatred. And replacing a vigorous satire on the follies of contemporary literary and political life is a fantasy that envisions its subjugation and death. In "Flowering Rifle" the "tapering" avenues of the prose writer and poet in Campbell do indeed unite—and the prose sensibility wins out. The result is pure nihilism.

By mid-1939, with war imminent, Campbell's fascist beliefs were abruptly put aside when he joined the British Army. In a matter of months, he disavowed his view that fascism was the sole upholder of the spiritual values he cherished. It is Peter Alexander's view that the Hitler-Stalin pact caused Campbell to reverse himself once again. Although it may have been the only intelligent political decision Campbell ever made, let us not forget the real reason for it: Hitler, by selling out to the Russians, was not enough of a fascist for him. But like his counterparts on the Left who also reversed themselves as a result of the pact, the decision allowed Campbell the opportunity—or at least the hope—of beginning the postwar years on a new footing.

In 1941, Campbell declared that the English people are "greater, nobler, and better than ever before in history," their nation "the healthiest . . . alive!" But his literary enemies remained unforgiving. "A member of the Axis, I believe," said Augustus John upon meeting Campbell again, and Robert Nichols called him "that horrid fascist." No one seemed to care that Campbell was now a proud soldier in the Royal Welch Fusiliers. He wrote at the time:

> And if the dreadful hour should chime
> For British blood, and steel as grim,
> My clock will wake, and tick the time,
> And slope his arms and march—and I'm
> The one to fall in step with him.
>
> ("The Clock in Spain")

Campbell here shifts into a contemplative mode, as he does in "Heartbreak Camp," a haunting, desolate ballad which suggests the grief of a man in need of yet another ballast, but unwilling to entrust himself to one.

> Red as the guardroom lamp
> The moon inspects the trees:
> High over Heartbreak Camp,
> Orion stands at ease:
>
> With buttons lit, for Sentry,
> He challenges who's there
> Acceding all the entry
> Whose passport is Despair. . . .

And in "Rhapsody of the Man in Hospital Blues," Campbell's gentle self-mockery about his increasing age barely covers his deep misgivings about the fate he has been assigned—or that he has assigned himself.

> From Notting Hill to Prince's Gate
> I'd started breaking-in my stick
> And of my new, three-legged gait
> Acquired the quaint arithmetic . . . .

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That though he seemed a drunken lout,
Less of a comrade than a weight,
I had no further choice or doubt
But to accept him as my fate . . . .

Gone was the thunder of great herds,
Lost was the lilt of marching men,
And void the bandolier of words
That feeds the rifle of my pen . . . .

We must be silent when men mutter,
We must keep calm when tempers rise,
And when we're shoved into the gutter
It's we who must apologise.

To have one's Cross laid on inside
Abates no ardour in the strife
Though something in us might have died
Yet something more had come to life.

For all the poignancy of these lines, the something that "had come to life" was not original poetry, for Campbell all but renounced it in his last decade. Peter Alexander provides us with no adequate clues about this decision (the biography on the whole contains very little material about Campbell's last decade), but it certainly seems as if Campbell himself had finally given up on all attempts to speak in his own poetic voice. In 1951 a second autobiographical volume called *Light on a Dark Horse* appeared. It is not as vitriolic and vengeful as *Broken Record,* but it sheds scarcely any light on its subject either. Its digressive, artless narrative consists almost entirely of embroidered or wholly fabricated accounts of travel adventures and personal exploits. Once again the poet and the poetry are, for the most part, censored out.

Campbell's actions at this time became as trivial as his words. When the aging poet bloodied Spender's nose at a reading sponsored by the Poetry Society in April, 1949, and when he supposedly slapped Geoffrey Grigson in the BBC canteen because of Grigson's attack on Desmond MacCarthy (to whom Campbell owed his job), the furors that erupted were tinged with pathos. Interestingly, it was the Grigson fray that won for Campbell the admiration of Edith Sitwell, who had had a long-standing feud with Grigson. Concerned at this stage of her life with little more than settling old scores, Sitwell adopted Campbell as her noble knight-errant—or dupe—whom she would send out to fight her petty literary squabbles. Sitwell returned the favor by writing a preface to the third volume of Campbell's *Collected Poems* (published by The Bodley Head in 1957) in which she called him "one of the very few great poets of our time."

Campbell devoted himself in the years after the war to translations, primarily of Baudelaire and St. John of the Cross. His translations of St. John of the Cross were published in 1951 to wide acclaim. The literary world embraced Campbell for the first time in nearly twenty years. Significantly, it was for poems that were *not* written directly out of Campbell's own experience.

There is, however, a distinctly personal element in certain of these translations. The St. John poems, for example, can be seen as the most important gloss on Campbell's fight against the hysteria of his earlier life. With their seemingly effortless and breathtaking clarity and devotional purity, they embody Campbell's final, willed effort to remove himself from the material and political world that had nearly destroyed him, as the following excerpts indicate.

To chase a quarry so divine,
I had to soar so high and fine
That soon I lost myself from view . . . .

Nor keep me bound and struggling here
Within the bonds of living breath . . . .

The man who truly there has come
Of his own self must shed the guise;
Of all he knew before the sum
Seems far beneath that wondrous prize . . . .

The best known poem in the collection is "Upon a Gloomy Night," printed here in its entirety.

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Upon a gloomy night,
With all my cares to loving ardours flushed,
(O venture of delight!)
With nobody in sight
I went abroad when all my house was hushed.

In safety, in disguise,
In darkness up the secret stair I crept,
(O happy enterprise!)
Concealed from other eyes
When all my house at length in silence slept.

Upon that lucky night
In secrecy, inscrutable to sight,
I went without discerning
And with no other light
Except for that which in my heart was burning.

It lit and led me through
More certain than the light of noonday clear
To where One waited near
Whose presence well I knew,
There where no other presence might appear.

Oh night that was my guide!
Oh darkness dearer than the morning's pride,
Oh night that joined the lover
To the beloved bride
Transfiguring them each into the other.

Within my flowering breast
Which only for himself entire I save
He sank into his rest
And all my gifts I gave
Lulled by the airs with which the cedars wave.

Over the ramparts fanned
While the fresh wind was fluttering his tresses,
With his serenest hand
My neck he wounded, and
Suspended every sense with its caresses.

Lost to myself I stayed
My face upon my lover having laid
From all endeavour ceasing;
And all my cares releasing
Threw them amongst the lilies there to fade.

How far Campbell is from the image-clogged lines of *The Flaming Terrapin,* the obscure symbolism of *Mithraic Emblems,* and the political squalor of "Flowering Rifle," and from what he called, in 1933, the "human lineaments" of fascism. Campbell wrote like a man released from the burdens of earthly experience. He finds no occasion for venom and revenge. These translations—begun at the age of thirty-nine and completed at fifty—are Campbell's best work, the work that now seems most likely to survive.

Given the complex and divided nature of Campbell's life, it is no wonder that he proves such a formidable challenge to the writers and critics who have attempted to write about him. Nearly everyone who has accepted this challenge has had some stake in his beliefs and actions, even when those beliefs and actions were the objects of attack. From Sitwell to Spender, no one has been able to separate the judgment of the poet from that of the man.

Unfortunately, Peter Alexander suffers from much the same handicap. He is guilty of special pleading for his literary compatriot. This special pleading takes the form of sweeping aside the more repugnant aspects of Campbell's personality by claiming that they were merely a pose. Thus, a lifetime of beliefs, politics, and action is said to be nothing more than a "realistic mask" which "must be torn aside before an attempt is made to see Campbell as he really was becomes possible."

This view often prompts Mr. Alexander to misrepresent his material. For example, in the two paragraphs he devotes to *Broken Record,* he dismisses Campbell's Hitlerism as a "mildly approving reference to the dictator." Regarding the reception of *Broken Record,* Alexander writes that

> the bourgeois-shockers (and nearly everyone else) believe[d] Campbell when he claimed to be in favour of Mussolini, and against nearly everything from machinery to Charlie Chaplin.

Alexander begins his chapter on 1933, the year of *Broken Record,* this way:

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> Campbell began 1933, the year Hitler came to power, with a sense of deep foreboding. In January the poet wrote presciently to C. J. Sibbett, 'the year nineteen thirty-three promises to be the dirtiest since the war—the Europeans are becoming barbarians again, I fear, and rapidly, too.'

This leads the reader unfamiliar with *Broken Record* (one, that is, who has only read Alexander's sparse quotation from it) to believe that Campbell felt 1933 to be the "dirtiest [year] since the war" because of Hitler's coming to power. This is manifestly untrue.

Campbell's purification fantasies of the late Thirties are described by Alexander in these terms.

> He longed for a simpler world, with a Romantic longing that is reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence's constant dreams of a 'colony of escape.'. . . It seems clear that Campbell expected the approaching conflict to culminate in an all-destroying Armageddon, and that the triumph he hoped and longed for would be the triumph of Resurrection. . . . After the holocaust, Campbell liked to believe, there would be left the green world of cowboys and ploughboys and poets.

According to Mr. Alexander, Campbell only rarely made decisions, especially political ones. Most often, people and events acted upon him: ". . . the battle lines were being drawn," "the cause had sought him out," and so on. "In Altea in late 1934," he says at one point, "the issues were more academic than real," but even if they were real "[t]he Campbells read no papers and owned no radio [and the] mail was unreliable at best."

Of Campbell's trip to Italy in the fall of 1938 (embarking on Mussolini's proud new ocean liner, the *Rex*), Mr. Alexander remarks that

> Campbell had always had a deep love of Latin literature and for all things Roman; he immensely enjoyed being a tourist in the city of his new faith.

This suggests that Campbell was at heart really something other than the sought-after celebrity-author of "Flowering Rifle," an avowedly ideological guest who remained in fascist Italy until March 1939. It does not surprise us, then, when Mr. Alexander remarks that the extremism of "Flowering Rifle" is evidence only of "the simplicity of [Campbell's] belief that [the poem] would aid Franco's cause."

Nor does Mr. Alexander adequately come to terms with Campbell's very uneven *oeuvre.* Alexander's selective quotations do little, in fact, to aid us in understanding Campbell's life and work, and very often they mislead the uninformed reader. For a judgment of Campbell's poetic accomplishments, at any rate, we would do better to turn to Mr. Alexander's edition of Campbell's *Selected Poems.*

The editing of a volume of selected poems need not be governed by the question of how adequately it represents the poet's entire *oeuvre,* but rather by the criterion of excellence alone. And in this Mr. Alexander has done a splendid job. His selection contains all of Campbell's best lyrics and even the choice excerpts from the longer poems is generally the right one. (Though his book might have contained a wider selection of Campbell's translations, especially those of *St. John.*) Poems like "Mass at Dawn," "The Gum Trees," "A Jug of Water," and the "Mary" sonnets represent the superb core of what is indisputably a fine collection by a genuine poet.

Peter Alexander's discrimination in assembling this *Selected Poems* has made possible, for the first time perhaps, the kind of disinterested judgment of Campbell's poetry that it has so desperately needed for a very long time. The *Selected Poems* increases the stature of a poet whose immense technical skill and vibrant, exotic eye will no doubt surprise and inspire a generation of readers and poets for whom he is, if not altogether obscure, at least shrouded in mystery and myth.

In "The Olive Tree I" Campbell wrote that "The enemy who shaped his thews/ . . .

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is inherent to his will." The poet's continual reversing of his opinions, the debauching and degrading of the noble ideals of his youth—heroism and nobility—by dragging them through the mud of fascism, and the violent attacks of the "prose" Campbell on the poet, all undermined Campbell's reputation in the way no left-wing conspiracy ever could. Campbell was not, as his wife Mary suggested in her preface to the Penguin edition of the St. John poems (1960), tyrannized by the modern world. He was tyrannized by himself. It seems to have been Campbell's bizarre wish that he become not just a famous poet, but a famous ruined poet. Only now, perhaps, are we in a position to determine the extent to which he succeeded in this ambition.

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The Philharmonic's new horizons

by Samuel Lipman

By devoting the first two weeks of June to a festival of contemporary music entitled "Horizons '83," the New York Philharmonic demonstrated once again that aesthetic tasks must be their own reward. In seven concerts (more accurately, six concerts and one open rehearsal) the Philharmonic, under the artistic direction of the American composer Jacob Druckman, attempted to give a conspectus of the traditionally oriented music written during the last fifteen years or so in this country and, to a limited extent, abroad. The festival undoubtedly demonstrated the Philharmonic's sense of responsibility toward our time; other, purely artistic, verdicts were much less favorable.

Everything about this festival was on a large scale. The Philharmonic is said to have lost a half million dollars on the concerts, an amount presumably to be made up by generous subventions from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), and several foundations, corporations, and individuals. Twenty-six works (by as many composers) were performed, under the direction of seven conductors—Zubin Mehta, Raymond Leppard, Arthur Weisberg, Larry Newland, Lukas Foss, Gunther Schuller, and Druckman himself. The concerts featured eighteen instrumental and vocal soloists. The Philharmonic was joined by five other performing groups, most of them active in new music: the Group for Contemporary Music, the New Swingle Singers, the New York Choral Artists, the New York New Music Ensemble, and Speculum Musicae. Even the audiences were large, averaging close to two thousand people at the best attended of the concerts. In addition to the concerts, there were symposia and meetings devoted to discussing the music and allied artistic fields.

Following its custom with events of which it is proud, the Philharmonic made sure the public was informed about the efforts it was making in the cause of contemporary music by taking out costly advertisements in the press and sending out elaborate mailings. An advance story in *The New York Times* arts and leisure section and a related piece in the *Times Magazine* helped to spread the news. Press coverage after the event was given a boost by the fact that one hundred twenty-five music critics were in New York at the time of "Horizons '83" to attend a professional meeting.

This massive undertaking was clearly not an isolated or idle act by the Philharmonic. Given its scope, it is perhaps best considered in three parts, beginning with the sponsorship of the festival and the reasons behind it, moving on to the music and its performances, and finishing with the reception of the festival by a sophisticated public. As we will see, "Horizons '83" sheds light both on the state of musical composition in our time and on the wider artistic context in

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which serious music is now being written.

It must be said at the outset that the New York Philharmonic is no Johnny-come-lately to new music. In the years since World War II alone, the orchestra's record in the performance of contemporary works is unmatched by any other American orchestra of comparable stature. Merely to mention the three music directors of the Philharmonic prior to Zubin Mehta is to recall significant and energetic service (each in a different way) to the compositions of the day. Dimitri Mitropoulos (from 1949 to 1958) zealously programmed pieces by little-known American and European composers, and he brought to New York such then shocking works as Strauss's *Elektra* and Berg's *Wozzeck* in what are increasingly perceived to be, in their energy and discipline, exemplary performances.[1] Leonard Bernstein (from 1958 to 1969) brought to his conducting at the Philharmonic his own stature and interests as one of America's foremost composers; his recordings of the music of Aaron Copland and William Schuman (and of Charles Ives, ignored until then) are but a limited documentation of Bernstein's impassioned and persuasive efforts. Though his heart was clearly not in the creative productions of the avant-garde, he played his share of shocking and provocative works, too.

When the Philharmonic chose the arch-modernist Pierre Boulez as its leader in 1971, it was clear that he had been given—at least at the outset of his tenure—a mandate to program the most difficult and challenging contemporary music. He fulfilled that mandate, and a listing of the modern works he selected (contained in the festival's souvenir booklet) makes for fascinating reading. But Boulez's virtues in performance were restricted to bringing clarity, order, and precision to the music he loved, and the music he loved did not seem to include the beloved standard repertoire of the nineteenth century. Boulez's departure from the Philharmonic in 1978 was thus regretted by neither the orchestra nor the press and public. Unlike Bernstein, Boulez has never returned as a guest conductor to the orchestra he once led.

Under Zubin Mehta, the Philharmonic has continued to play new music, although Mehta's choices have seemed, if not fewer than those of Boulez, somewhat more tame. Vastly more significant than the number of works Mehta has programmed or their style has been the attitude he has brought to their execution. He has seemed both defensive and unwillingly dutiful, as if he were doing an unpleasant task as well as he possibly could. Certain semi-contemporary works Mehta has indeed played with enthusiasm—most notably Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra*—but more often than not he has forced them into a vulgar romantic mold in which distinctions of phrasing and texture are ignored in favor of a merely rhetorical excitement finally resulting in dullness.

This lack on Mehta's part has not gone unnoticed by those in the artistic community committed to new music. Undoubtedly the Philharmonic's management, eager to guard the orchestra's reputation as a champion of contemporary music, has been worried by the discontent. But the problem isn't only Mehta. The Philharmonic's subscribers have so little taste for new music that performing it more often on regular concerts—let alone taking the time to improve the quality of its presentation—has seemed inadvisable, to say the least.

To both problems "Horizons '83" presented a solution. There is a hole in the orchestra's schedule at the end of the regular season that management has been unable to fill successfully since the late André Kostelanetz's Promenade Concerts. The musicians in the orchestra have to be paid for these weeks anyway, concerts or no, so why not (the reasoning must have gone) schedule a festival of new music? Because Mehta was so plainly not the right person to run such a festival,

1 Fortunately, broadcast dubbings of these performances are still easily available on LP discs: the *Wozzeck* is on Odyssey Y2-33126; the *Elektra* is circulating on at least one private label.

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the Philharmonic gave control of it to Jacob Druckman, the orchestra's composer-in-residence. Druckman responded to the challenge by doing more than simply choosing representative recent works. He picked a theme for the festival—"A New Romanticism?"—although it is not at all clear how much the theme affected his musical choices or how accurately this subtitle alludes to the reality of musical composition today. What is clear is that by using the word "romanticism" Druckman provided a legion of grateful music critics with a hook on which to hang yards of sophistical discussion.

At this point there seems little to be gained by joining the argument over the exact history or definition of romanticism. As Jacques Barzun demonstrated at the end of *Romanticism and the Modern Ego* (1943), the word has by now come to mean everything to everyone. In the case of the Philharmonic's festival, what romanticism is in theory is less important than how the word was used. Druckman explains his own use of it in an essay included in the festival's commemorative booklet, where he contrasts "the Apollonian, the Classical—logical, rational, chaste and explainable" with "the Dionysian, the Romantic—sensual, mysterious, ecstatic, transcending the explainable." According to Druckman, twentieth-century music prior to the 1960s—including Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Copland, Harris, Schuman, Hindemith, Webern, Boulez, Babbitt, Xenakis, and Carter, as well as the later Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Bartok—belonged to the domain of rationalism. Then:

> During the mid-1960s the tide began to change. Even though new works and new ideas continue to pour out at break-neck speed, we can sense a gradual change of focus, of spirituality and of goals.
>
> No matter how varied the surface of these musics are [sic], one can discern a steady re-emergence of those Dionysian qualities: sensuality, mystery, nostalgia, ecstasy, transcendency.

Druckman's essay is a kind of mini-manifesto. The old music, we are told, was rational, thoughtful, intellectual—in a word, dry. Forsaking this lifelessness, the music to be presented at the Philharmonic festival would be of the body and the feelings, affectful and moving in inexplicable ways. If you didn't like the old new music because it was boring and ugly, Druckman seems to say, you'll love what we've got to offer. This really involves two claims: that the music to be played at the festival would be significantly different from what had gone before and it would be differently—that is, more warmly—received than the "old" new music had been. Judging by the evidence of the concerts themselves, both claims are false.

The music of "Horizons '83" began on June 2 with a concert conducted by Raymond Leppard. Four works were presented: *Afterimages* (a world premiere) by the American composer Marc Antonio Consoli; *Ave Maris Stella* (performed by the New York New Music Ensemble, Robert Black conducting) by the English composer Peter Maxwell Davies; *Far calls. Coming Far!* (with violinist Ida Kavafian) by the Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu; and *All in the Golden Afternoon* (with soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson) by the American composer David Del Tredici.

The Consoli work, related (according to the program notes) to the composer's desire for children and his marital separation, quickly displayed something about the new romanticism that was to become evident throughout the festival: just how little of the music was new, and how depressingly much was old. The Consoli began like a continuation of Debussy's *Nocturnes* and soon became openly vulgar, with repeated chords and single notes in the brass in the style of Mahler. An ostinato chord motive, whooshing glissandi throughout the orchestra, an amplified celesta—everything seemed to pass without purpose. Despite the lush strings and rich brass, and the fruity percussion of the third movement, the piece amounted to a thick impasto built up out of uninteresting fragments.

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Davies's *Ave Maris Stella,* based programmatically on the idea of evoking the dawn and different times of the day, was written in a pallid international style reminiscent of Messiaen but without Messiaen's refulgent musicality. Even the marimba cadenza (brilliantly played by Druckman's son, Daniel) was unable to relieve the general impression of noodling improvisation relying all too much on stock elements—often thirds—stuck on the page without intrinsic connections.

The most up-to-date feature of Takemitsu's *Far calls. Coming far!* was the work's title, which is taken from *Finnegans Wake.* Otherwise, this rhapsody for violin and orchestra was a reversion to Debussy, bounded by Chausson on one side and by Szymanowski on the other. Its sensitive orchestration and long-lined melodies only added up to superior movie music of a mid-Forties vintage. The composition as a whole is at least an effective vehicle for an impassioned violin virtuoso, but Ida Kavafian lacked all the necessary emotional involvement and technical flair to bring the work's borrowed atmosphere off, and Leppard seemed unduly dispassionate and distant.

The real interest of the evening lay in *All in the Golden Afternoon,* a continuation of Del Tredici's settings of Lewis Carroll's words from *Alice in Wonderland.* This piece was clearly the main attraction for the many Del Tredici enthusiasts in the audience, who certainly got their money's worth. It began like the Venusberg music from *Tannhäuser* and progressed via Mahler to *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Salome* of Richard Strauss. It featured an amplified soprano who often got too close to the microphone, producing perhaps unintended whoops and gushes. By the end, the *Salome* mood had become overpowering, and the huge orchestra combined with the larger-than-life soprano to create a monstrous perversion of Carroll's deft and evocative words. Del Tredici's work is the apotheosis of Camp, and the standing and cheering ovation that greeted it was clearly derived more from social than from musical concerns.

The next concert, on June 3, was conducted by Arthur Weisberg, the well-known contemporary music specialist. Again four works were presented, this time all by American composers: *Chords,* by Fred Lerdahl, the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra by John Harbison (with violinist Charles Rex), the Triple Concerto for Soprano Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Contrabass Clarinet and Chamber Orchestra (performed by Anand Devendra, Dennis Smylie, Les Thimmig, and the Group for Contemporary Music conducted by Harvey Sollberger), and *Foci I* by Leonard Rosenman.

In contrast to the limited excitement of the opening night's program, the second concert was routine and lifeless. The Lerdahl was an avant-garde exercise in the manipulation of musical elements. It used consonant chords, which became increasingly dissonant as the piece went along. The work is not fully notated, so many of the notes had been left to chance. As a result, *Chords* had all the rhythmic interest of an anarchic funeral procession. The chords referred to in the title were rarely played together, and the end of the piece tailed off into a boring nothingness.

The Harbison violin concerto is an outstanding example of the music that results from the desire—shared by many composers today—to write an "appealing" music. It began with an attractive brass flourish, followed by the juicy strings so familiar to us from Hollywood. The rhapsodic violin part and the varied orchestral activity were clearly written in an attempt to break out of what many feel to have been the emotional restrictions and intellectual demands of modernism. The solo melodies were often written in octaves, which produced a rich and satisfying sound; the slow movement contained an effective passage pitting the violin's upper register against a powerful bass line in the orchestra. The piece lacked the passionate intensity of, say, comparable music of Berg and Bartok, but it must be said that it was not done full justice at the festival: the soloist (a member of the Philharmonic violin

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section) was not a compelling player, and Arthur Weisberg's conducting did nothing to animate the proceedings.

The Martino Triple Concerto was very different. It was not "appealing" music and it did not try to be. It was made up of fragmented motives, random entrances and encounters, and angular melodic contours that seemed to come straight out of the constructivist period of the 1960s avant-garde. In its dissection of the musical line, it was not quite pointillistic, but it was pointless. And none of the three forms of the clarinet Martino chose to feature could bear the weight of a solo part.

The return to the 1960s continued with the last work, Rosenman's *Foci I.* This essay in timbral modification, micro-tonality, and rhythmic transitions did achieve a vaguely sinister quality and sometimes even sounded like the kind of modern music that used to scare people who were used to the music of the classical masters. It is hard to say just how adequate the performance actually was, however: as usual, the Philharmonic's string playing was uninvolved and insecure; at one point in the piece the second stand of cellos, having missed a page turn and being evidently lost, started laughing.

The June 4 concert, led by Druckman and Larry Newland, the assistant conductor of the Philharmonic, began with *Ascent into Air* of Morton Subotnick (conducted by Newland), continued with the *Chromatic Fantasy* of Barbara Kolb (with Tony Randall as narrator), went on to the *Lupercalia* of Sandor Balassa (conducted by Druckman), and ended with the *Grand Pianola Music* of John Adams (with pianists Alan Feinberg and Ursula Oppens, sopranos Jane Bryden and Pamela Wood, and mezzo-soprano Kimball Wheeler).

Morton Subotnick is a cult hero of the old avant-garde. Looking something like a well-dressed Santa Claus, the bearded composer sat at the side of the stage using a computer to modify the sounds of the amplified instruments being played by the musicians. The resulting sound, although relatively consonant, was full of sustained roars and heavings as it came out, distorted, of the large onstage speakers. If the piece had any comprehensibility, it resided not in the music but in the program notes, which shifted easily between philosophical metaphors and allusions to electronic technology. Clearly for Subotnick, as for the many composers today who resemble him, intellectual virtuosity has displaced serious musical creativity.

Barbara Kolb's *Chromatic Fantasy* sets to music a text by someone variously described in the program notes as Robert or Howard Stern. Kolb's piece is scored for narrator, alto flute, oboe, trumpet, soprano saxophone, electric guitar, and vibraphone; the narrator, flute, guitar, and vibraphone are "discreetly" amplified. Musically the work is slight; in its neoclassicism it is clearly indebted to Stravinsky. According to the program notes, Kolb associates her *Chromatic Fantasy* with Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat,* Boulez's *Rituel,* and Bach's own *Chromatic Fantasy.* The psychotic text, describing a fantasy-encounter with one or more young women, distantly suggests still another twentieth-century model, Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire.* In the performance, one element, and that nonmusical, stood out: Tony Randall's narration, both witty and well projected, reduced the music to subsidiary status.

Balassa's *Lupercalia,* subtitled "Concerto in Memory of Stravinsky," was another faceless piece built on nondescript fragments. Full of blasts from the lower instruments, its sole virtue was that it possessed a certain amount of rhythmic character, although this may have owed more to the strong, if visually crude, conducting of Jacob Druckman than to the music itself.

The conclusion of the third concert was elephantine. Adams's *Grand Pianola Music* is a work out of the school of minimalists Terry Riley, Philip Glass, and Steve Reich. The early moments—one wants to say hours—of the piece were an impasto of pulsing sounds based on agglomerations of notes derived from seventh chords. There were

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interminable arpeggiated figures spreading across the sonic landscape, singers humming away like the Andrew Sisters gone amok, an E-flat seventh chord sounding for what seemed like eternity, chords up and down both pianos in the fashion of the best Russian concertos, and a modulation indistinguishable from the first progression in Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto. It all came to a climax on a big tune perilously close to that of the slow movement of the Chopin E-minor Piano Concerto. Adams can rest content with having written the biggest unstaged Busby Berkeley musical in history. The mingled cheers and boos of the audience added up to a mini-sensation.

The next event of the festival, on June 7, was an open rehearsal of new and unperformed works. Zubin Mehta conducted the Philharmonic in *dream of the morning sky* (Cycle V) by Aaron Jay Kernis (with soprano Gwendolyn Bradley) and *Symphony from Silence* by Nicholas Thorne (with pianist Christopher Oldfather). In between, Arthur Weisberg led a fragment of *A Haunted Landscape,* a work in progress by George Crumb. Matters got under way with a short speech by Druckman, who thanked the Philharmonic for their efforts and then announced that "Mr. Zubin" would introduce each of the composers as they came out.

The first composer to be so honored was Kernis, a slight twenty-three-year-old just out of the Yale music school, where his teachers had been (among others) Druckman and Subotnick. Kernis made a somewhat rambling and incoherent attempt to tell the orchestra members about his piece, describing the work as a progress from amorphous states through various degrees of spiritual enlightenment, leading to the true humanity focused in all of us; his program notes state that the work "is about the process of being born, of becoming human." The composition is in three parts, ending with a setting for soprano of the words of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet N. Scott Momaday. A quotation from this text will help to illuminate the composer's approach to life, if not the sound of his music:

> I am a feather on the bright sky
> I am the blue horse that runs in the plain . . .
> I am an angle of geese in the winter sky
> I am the hunger of a young wolf
> I am the whole dream of these things . . .
> I stand in good relation to the earth
> I stand in good relation to the gods
> I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful
> I am alive, I am alive

Not surprisingly, Kernis's composition sounded at the outset like planetarium music, complete with a representation of the first birds of day. Again, the prime model was Debussy; a huge crescendo suggested that Kernis had also learned his lessons from *2001.* Though the amplified singer's words couldn't be understood clearly—her "I" always sounded like "Oi"—the final section ended up sounding like a sophisticated Richard Rodgers writing "Uniting With the Galaxy."

More interesting than the music was the attitude of "Mr. Zubin" toward the composer and his work. First Mehta played a long section through; his most substantive comment immediately after was that the accents hadn't come out. Then he quickly assumed a patronizing attitude toward Kernis, lecturing him (in front of the audience) on his inadequate technique in orchestration. He responded to Kernis's request for softer playing by telling him that he had written for too many instruments. Though Mehta felt free to make jokes to the audience, he showed no familiarity with the music, finding little to comment on as he riffled through the pages of the score. He made no attempt to clarify balance or correct errors. He remarked that passages weren't together but he never specified what had gone wrong. Given his evident lack of interest in the task he was publicly performing, one could only wonder why he had chosen to do it in the first place.

Arthur Weisberg began his work on Crumb's *A Haunted Landscape* by saying

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that he wanted to rehearse orchestral balances before playing the fragment through. In contrast to Mehta, Weisberg knew the music he was conducting. He began by working with the harpists, whom he asked to play louder (they couldn't). He went on to trying to get just the right sound from the pianist, who was hitting the innards of the piano; the best tool for the purpose turned out to be a percussion mallet. Weisberg then discussed how the tam-tam should be bowed, suggesting an up- rather than a downbow. Weisberg even went so far as to ask the strings to play very softly. Unfortunately, their attempts only proved that the Philharmonic cannot play *pianissimo* and together at the same time.

By now, boredom could plainly be seen on the faces of many orchestra members. A functionary came out to tell Weisberg that the time for the break was approaching, so the audience finally got a chance to hear Crumb's eight-minute fragment in its entirety. The score was typical of the composer, combining in a purposeless way percussion effects and reminiscences of other composers, in this case string chords seemingly drawn from Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Tallis.*

This evening, too, ended with a whale of a piece. Thorne's *Symphony from Silence* is another minimalist work, substituting huge volumes of sound played at extraordinary length for any discernible musical activity. After about five minutes of tedious orchestral stasis, the pianist entered with pointless repeated *fortissimo* chords, almost inaudible because of the orchestra's blaring away. When the piano did make itself heard, the tone was mean and dry. There were wayward chord progressions and a huge rattling piano cadenza, informed by a meaningless jumble of demi-Rachmaninoff technical clichés. Mehta stopped about fifteen minutes into the piece to ask the composer for comment. Before Thorne could answer, Mehta said, "Please say it was good," presumably so the orchestra could continue and end the "rehearsal" without going into overtime. *Symphony from Silence* is a piece of such amateurishness that it is difficult to say whether it deserved better than this.

The next night, Mehta conducted a real concert, beginning the program with three *Colloquies* for French Horn and Orchestra by William Schuman (with Philip Myers, the Philharmonic's principal horn, as soloist). Next came *Canti del Sole* for tenor and orchestra by Bernard Rands (with Paul Sperry). The last work of the evening was *Sinfonia* by the Italian Luciano Berio (with the New Swingle Singers).

From the beginning of the Schuman it was clear that one was listening to the work of a master musician. *Colloquies,* written in 1979, gave an impression of continuity that until now had been lacking in the festival's offerings. The differing timbres of the solo horn combined with the lone, arching, "American" melodic lines to make an integrated, meaningful, and moving music. It must be stressed that *Colloquies* succeeded in this performance despite Mehta's evident lack of care in rehearsal for proper articulation and phrasing, and despite insecure horn playing and ensemble lapses in the strings. To those who would complain that in Schuman's work there is nothing new, that he repeatedly mines the same compositional vein, *Colloquies* made an eloquent rebuttal. Only someone whose taste has been formed by the merely diverting and the trivially provocative could fail to recognize in it the incremental growth of a distinguished creator.

While such splendid marks can hardly be given to Rands's *Canti del Sole,* which followed the Schuman, here at least was highly professional music, using a large and skillfully handled orchestra. In his setting of poems by (among others) Wilfred Owen, Dylan Thomas, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Montale, and D. H. Lawrence, Rands was concerned, in his own words, to "suggest both the daily (dawn to dusk) and seasonal (winter to autumn) cycles of the sun: 'narratives' which influence our physical and psychological states." The music did suggest Mahler and even the concluding section of Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder,* but it also had a purpose

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and direction of its own. Unfortunately, Mehta often allowed the orchestra to obscure the singer, so the words were not as clear as they might have been.

The concluding *Sinfonia* of Berio, written in 1968-69, is a classic of the approachable avant-garde. The amplified singers mumble, mutter, hiss, and sometimes sing recognizable words. When the words are clear, they invoke such fashionable icons of the 1960s as Lévi-Strauss, Martin Luther King, and Samuel Beckett. The third section of the work quotes Mahler at length, and also makes reference to the works of Bach, Schoenberg, Debussy, Ravel, Richard Strauss, Berlioz, Brahms, Berg, Hindemith, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Boulez, Henri Posseur, Vinko Globokar, Stockhausen, and to Berio himself. This pastiche, though relatively conventional, is provocative in the way it discordantly strings together its elements, both musical and verbal. The audience loved it, no doubt in part because so many of the tunes were recognizable.

Lukas Foss's concert of June 10 lost whatever momentum Mehta's program had managed to gain the night before. Here again were four pieces: *Imago Mundi* by George Rochberg, *Baroque Variations* by Foss himself, *Sparrows* by Joseph Schwanter (performed by soprano Lucy Shelton with the Speculum Musicae conducted by Donald Palma), and *The Silence of the Infinite Spaces* by Frederic Rzewski (performed by the New York Choral Artists with the composer as piano soloist).

Imago Mundi was yet another example of George Rochberg's use of borrowed materials, in this case ancient Japanese court music. Unlike his usual borrowings, which at least have the individuality of those whose work has been stolen from, this piece was without even second-hand personal distinction. The string ensemble was once again terrible. The faces of some members of the first violin section betrayed a certain disgust while the music was going on—whether at the composition or at their own playing was not immediately clear.

Foss's own work, *Baroque Variations,* was a recomposition of three pieces: the aria *Larghetto e piano* from Handel's Concerto Grosso, opus 6 no. 12, Scarlatti's Sonata no. 23 in E-major, and the Prelude from Bach's Partita in E-major for unaccompanied violin. Here was a combination of Gerard Hoffnung and Peter Schickele—but without the fun and high spirits. Instead, Foss brought to these beautiful pieces what can only be called decomposition. Sudden swells on random notes and chords, cruelly wrong harmonies, blatant sounds from an electric organ and electric piano—all comported strangely with leering observances of authentic baroque performance practices. It should be said that reworkings of the classics are not impossible to do in a serious and even profound way: Hans Werner Henze, in *Il Vitalino raddoppiato* (1977), performed the operation on no less a chestnut than the famous Chaconne of Vitali. But Henze produced a real and interesting work very much his own. Foss only mocked what to him are musical pieties, although to others they are works of imperishable beauty.

Schwanter's *Sparrows* was a musical combination of the sonic devices of George Crumb and the structural simplicities of minimalism. Echoes of Mahler—this time *Das Lied von der Erde*—could be heard yet again, along with suggestions of the film music of William Walton. Although the music was a setting of fifteen intriguing Japanese *haikai,* the effect was exceptionally bland, even by the standards of the festival.

"Bland" could hardly be applied to Rzewski's *The Silence of the Infinite Spaces,* heard on this occasion in its New York premiere. The composer is well known for combining avant-garde tastes (he was a co-founder in 1966 of the Musica Elettronica Viva group in Rome) with what his program biography called a "commitment to social issues." In fact, Rzewski is a dedicated supporter of liberation movements the world over; his most renowned piece so far is a huge set of variations, dating from 1975, on a radical Chilean song of the Allende period, "The People United Will Never Be Defeated."

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That work was a virtuoso piano piece, immediately attractive, catchy, and essentially simpleminded, despite its use of various modernistic compositional techniques. *The Silence of the Infinite Spaces,* however, was both less ideological and less beguiling. Aleatorically notated, the piece was a virtual barnyard of orchestral effects. In the end it sounded like nothing so much as jungle music, complete with tomtoms and the yelps of victims, this despite the fact that it included as well a tape of sounds recorded in a steel mill. The piece concluded, to many cheers and boos, with a tape of Atlantic Ocean noises, enriched by the sound of a (propeller) airplane passing overhead.

The festival's last concert, on June 15, was conducted by Gunther Schuller. Again, four pieces were programmed: *A Reliquary* for Igor Stravinsky by Charles Wuorinen, *Aureole* by Jacob Druckman, *Adagio* for Oboe and String Orchestra (played by Philharmonic oboist Joseph Robinson) by Tison Street, and Schuller's own Concerto No. 2 for Orchestra. The only reason for not calling the concert an anticlimax is that the word would flatter too much what had come before.

Wuorinen's *Reliquary* included several small fragments of a piece for orchestra that Stravinsky had projected about 1967. The rest of the piece, while sounding like late Stravinsky, is Wuorinen's own. Although it all seemed rigorously planned—Wuorinen's music always does—and although there were many traditional elements, including a violin cadenza, the result was shapeless and faceless. It is Wuorinen's genius to write so that the very reality of pitch loses musical meaning. In part this is what happens to serial composition in less than gifted hands. But some of the aridity of *Reliquary* is undoubtedly Wuorinen's: he is not a composer whose character and personality emerge in his music.

I have never been convinced by Jacob Druckman's music. He is musically very talented, but he has never been able to put his gift for imaginative orchestral scoring in the service of a long musical or architectural line. His saving grace has been that his music is always sensually appealing and never ugly. And so it was with *Aureole.* It had a vaguely oriental quality; fragments of big-band jazz peeked out from time to time; at the end there was a long ostinato in the violins against which everybody in the orchestra had a go at displaying various disjointed fragments. *Aureole* was less integrated music than a comment on the elements of music, as if one were to suggest a meal by showing the ingredients one or two at a time.

Tison Street's *Adagio,* mercifully short, certainly sounded like music. The only trouble was that it sounded like other people's music—lock, stock, and barrel. The work relied heavily on slurping solo strings as a foil to the solo oboe. The rich harmonies suggested a late nineteenth-century violin concerto as written by a slick 1940s movie composer. There were many Wagnerisms, and a suggestion of Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration.* If copyrights were non-expiring, however, the composer Street would have really been in trouble with was Mahler, truly one of the patron saints of the festival.

With Schuller's Concerto No. 2 for Orchestra, the concluding work of the entire series, matters were once again back to fragments. The first movement was made up of darting figures, with the winds leading the way and strident full orchestral chords just behind. There was a suggestion of Ravel's *La Valse* gone haywire, and a little later, in the second movement, a bit of his *Pavanne.* The third movement featured huge chords, while various percussion instruments were beaten to death. This was followed by a soft, soulful excursion into the mood and music of Act III of Wagner's *Tristan.* At the end, the piece returned to chords, this time, as the program notes stated, "almost in C-major." Schuller's conducting, even in his own composition, was tentative and clumsy; time and again, simple orchestral attacks were shaky and not together. Perhaps only Schuller himself really knows whether a

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better performance would have helped the piece.

Many questions arise from a consideration of this long and dreary story. Perhaps the first one is simply whether all this music was really different from the older, pre-1968 contemporary writing. Viewed one way, the answer is yes. In the Philharmonic festival there were no open provocations, no impassioned attempts to tell the audience that music was dead and that only fools liked such outdated indulgences as melody and consonant harmony. To put it in a word, things were pleasant.

And yet much in these concerts was not a change from what had gone before. For one thing, some of the same people were involved. Morton Subotnick, Luciano Berio, and Frederic Rzewski, for example, are old avant-gardists still in good standing. Old avant-garde devices, too, were clearly in good standing—computers, tape-produced sounds, out-of-the-way instruments, or conventional instruments played in an out-of-the-way manner. Electronic amplification was common for both instruments and voices, and familiar extra-musical shibboleths undergirded the music, shibboleths ranging from political and literary ideas to fashionable ideologies of personal awareness and earth worship. Indeed, the very emphasis of the Philharmonic festival on newness and change was itself a prominent feature of the avant-garde approach to aesthetic phenomena.

There are those, of course, who will point to the *sound* of the music performed in these concerts and say that it is qualitatively different from what had gone on compositionally in the 1960s and just before. Was there not in this music, it will be plaintively asked, melody and harmony, shape and grace, all frankly inspired by an attempt to please? Yes, the answer must be, there were tunes and consonant chords aplenty—though in fact they didn't turn up in every piece. But where these valuable elements were present, they were merely identifiable rather than memorable, interesting more for the manner of their appearance than for their distinctive musical content. And even as style this relatively traditional way of writing was not artistically convincing. The manner so frequently favored in these earnestly attractive compositions was borrowed, after all, from honored predecessors. The ghosts of Debussy, Strauss, and Mahler hung heavy over Avery Fisher Hall.

All this is now being explained away as a happy development. Every style, so it would appear, is now permitted and welcomed, and this is supposedly a good thing, even—as in the cases of George Rochberg and Tison Street—when the composer completely abandons his own voice. But only the naïve should be pleased with what is at best a confession of creative impotence or at worst out-and-out theft. I suppose an argument could be made for this appropriation on the basis of its appeal to the tastes of the public, so long alienated from the new music. But the only available evidence suggests that the audience for serious music, acting as always on the pleasure principle, finds this new music only relatively less painful than what came before. Because this music is tolerated, for a variety of reasons both social and ideological, doesn't mean that it is liked, or still less that it will be demanded.

In this regard, it is instructive to look at *The New York Times*'s critical coverage of the Philharmonic concerts. *The Times*'s chief music critic, Donal Henahan, found only one concert—the last—worthy of covering himself. Even the newspaper's unabashed advocate of new music, John Rockwell, covered only the first three concerts; the remaining concerts were assigned to junior writers. Henahan, although enthusiastically applauding Street's *Adagio* as "a work . . . of obvious musical qualities . . . a score that [may well] be added to the standard repertory," found nothing else on the one program he attended to be either "romantic" or valuable. (Because he heard so little of the festival, he was unable, of course, to write a considered critical analysis at the end of the series.) Rockwell was cool toward many of the pieces in the three concerts he heard,

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showing real enthusiasm for none of them and offering guarded praise for only a few. Not only was benevolent caution the order of the day for Rockwell, he was careful, in his generally favorable summing-up article, to make clear just how limited he thought the whole Philharmonic effort was:

> Of course, when one speaks of New Romanticism in "music" one means the art music that has commonly been the concern of intellectuals and of composers with a clear sense of connection to the tradition of "serious" composition in the West. The Philharmonic never attempted to address itself to broader questions touching on the newly aspired-to "seriousness" of music arising out of vernacular traditions and third-world Classical tradition, or even the precise connection between the more extreme forms of American experimentalism and conventional "contemporary music."

"Horizons '83" was indeed less than successful musically. Should the Philharmonic have made such an effort on behalf of all these pieces and their composers? Despite the festival's artistic shortcomings, the answer is yes. One of the functions of major musical institutions (and, given the present ossification of the accepted repertory, perhaps the major one) must be the presentation of that which is actually going on in musical creation at the present time. These institutions must make this effort not just when the effort can confidently be expected to be successful, for then everyone and every group will quite enthusiastically join the act, but even more when the going is rough and the outcome unpredictable, as is now the case in our musical culture.

Viewed in this way, Leonard Bernstein's presentation of avant-garde music in the 1960s deserved doing, just as Pierre Boulez's vigorous and innovative programming in the 1970s deserved doing. *Mutatis mutandis,* "Horizons '83" deserved doing, too. To say this is not to suggest that all the selections, even within the series' own frame of reference, were correctly made, or even that these selections were widely and fairly representative of what is going on in composition today. Nor, most emphatically, is it to say that the works chosen were well served by the performances they received.

Next time around—and it is to be hoped that next time will be next year—the Philharmonic may well find it possible to present, along with music by new discoveries, the recent work of established masters; in this connection, the names of Boulez and Carter immediately come to mind. Perhaps, too, the next series can include the work of other composers, less well known, who have been writing distinguished music over a period of many years. Perhaps the Philharmonic will in the future take the trouble to secure well-rehearsed and powerfully led performances of the difficult contemporary works it programs. And perhaps by the time of a new festival the Philharmonic will once again be playing like the great orchestra its player members surely entitle it to be. Then and only then the musical news from Fisher Hall will be not just news but good news.

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The two Flauberts

by David Paul

"It is strange," wrote Flaubert, aged twenty-five, to his friend Maxime du Camp, "how I was born with little faith in happiness. While still very young I had a complete presentiment of life. It was like a nauseating smell of cooking escaping through a ventilator; you don't have to eat it to know how it would make you vomit." Put that side by side with a remark of Baudelaire's in his journals: "When I was still quite small I would experience two quite contradictory sensations: the horror of life, and the ecstasy of life. Just the thing for a lazy hypochondriac." Baudelaire's words are less concrete, much less emphatic, more balanced—and they carry the sting of detached self-criticism. After all, what faith can one be *born* with? An imaginative capacity for joy, gaiety, and comedy may have nothing to do with happiness, can even be a creative substitute for mere personal happiness. But Flaubert was never to see it that way. Life as a bad, stale smell was to be flouted, escaped from—or else, with a mighty effort of will, to be confronted, studied, analyzed, always with a carefully suppressed sense of nausea.

In a letter written a year or two later Flaubert comes more to grips with himself, and his Laocoöntine problem. "In me," he writes "there are two distinct persons, one who is infatuated with bombast, lyricism, eagle flights, sonorities of phrase, and another who digs and burrows . . . who likes to treat a humble fact as respectfully as a big one." Here he forecasts the two opposed writers he was to become: the devotee of the exotic, the impossibly remote, the bizarre (St. Antoine, Salammbô, Herodias); and the protestingly self-enslaved narrator of the commonplace (*Madame Bovary, L'Éducation sentimentale, Un Coeur simple*). In effect he remained a lifelong hyper-romantic, convinced that contemporary, everyday life in all its circumstances was sordid, boring, banal, and utterly devoid of all the qualities of that capitalized word Beauty, which he so often used and never attempted to define. Even as late as 1864 he could write that "the goal of Art is exaltation of one kind or another." But "Beauty is not compatible with modern life. So this is the last time I'll deal with it. I've had enough." At this time he was engaged on *L'Éducation sentimentale*. Two more novels of modern life, *Un Coeur simple* and the long worked over but never completed *Bouvard et Pécuchet,* were still to come.

Given all this, can Flaubert be called a great letter writer? To judge by Francis Steegmuller's present selection of Flaubert's letters, I cannot think so.[1] True, he could write a splendid letter when some catastrophe that struck him lifted him out of himself and yet intensified his objective,

1 *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1857-1880,* selected, edited, and translated by Francis Steegmuller. Harvard University Press, 309 pages, $15. *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1830-1857* was published by Harvard in 1981.

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unsparing alertness to everything he felt and saw. The death of a beloved friend, Alfred le Poittevin, when Flaubert was only twenty-six, was one such instance:

> At daybreak, about four o'clock . . . I lifted him, turned him, covered him. The feeling of the coldness and rigidity of his limbs stayed in my fingertips all the next day. He was horribly decomposed: the sheets were stained through. We wrapped him in two shrouds. When it was done he looked like an Egyptian mummy in its bandages, and I was filled with an indescribable joy and relief on his account. There was a whitish mist, the trees were beginning to be visible through it. The two tapers shone in the dawning whiteness; two or three birds sang, and I recited to myself the sequence from his *Bélial,* "Il ira, joyeux oiseau, saluer dans les pins le soleil levant"—or rather I heard his voice saying it to me, and for the rest of the day I was deliciously obsessed by it.

But such letters are exceptional. And I fail to discern what Steegmuller calls, in his introduction to the second volume of Flaubert's letters, "the rich intellectual content of the later letters." Early and late, the letters are all too often loaded to overflowing with vehement intellectual muddle. He worshipped the giants of the written word—Homer, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare—but could assert that "they seem to me *pitiless.* They are bottomless, infinite, manifold." In his letters and in his talk, Flaubert was a frequent prey to that endemic French disease, rhetoric. It is rhetorical nonsense to say that Shakespeare is pitiless. How could the pity of it all, in Lear, Pericles, Othello, be expressed without the cruelty of life being registered?

If the assertion is meaningless as applied, it does illuminate Flaubert's own artistic credo, the conviction that the novelist must be as absent as God in his work. "I do not want my book to contain a single subjective reaction," he tells Louise Colet, while at work on *Madame Bovary.* But all human perception, imagination, reaction is by its nature subjective to a degree, and to try to suppress that element is most likely to intensify it, a fact among many that Flaubert was blind to. Is there a character, a portrait in all fiction more loaded with personal contempt and hatred than that of Homais, the pharmacist? Yet he remains a mechanical type, a puppet devised to exemplify all the traits of the bourgeois that Flaubert most loathed. As a result, he becomes a predictable bore whose reappearances one dreads. Many of the comic figures in fiction might have been bores or worse in fact—Mr. Collins, Miss Bates, Micawber, Squeers. Even Dostoevsky, scarcely thought of as a comic novelist, had the instinct, the *nous,* to make Verkhovensky—the fictional stand-in for his pet aversion, Turgenev—into a figure of high comedy. The portrait of Verkhovensky—his poses, his enlightened sympathies, his anxiety to identify with the young—is subtle, mischievous, and exaggerated, as all caricature has to be. A minor feat for a great novelist like Dostoevsky, it represents something Flaubert could never achieve.

The trouble with Flaubert was that his hatred of the bourgeois was self-hatred. The bourgeois was his own dreaded doppelgänger. In a sudden retrospective outburst, he exclaimed "Emma Bovary, c'est moi!" but he could have said the same of Homais with quite as much truth. At what was to prove one of the most critical moments of his life, it is the Homais in Flaubert that comes to the surface, and makes the decision. Confronted with the problem of an orphaned, pretty, and penniless niece, how to advise her, how to dispose of her fate, the apothecary would have written in the same way as Flaubert, but with less double-talk. The girl in question was Caroline, whose mother, Gustave's sister, had died at the child's birth and whose father was now in an asylum. From babyhood Caroline had been the care of her grandmother and uncle—and of a succession of English governesses. But now, at seventeen, she presented them with the standard bourgeois problem: how to settle her, how to get her safely off their hands and into a prosperous marriage with a respectable young man of means. Such a man,

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Ernest Commanville, a lumber importer from Rouen, had already declared himself a suitor. He had all the qualities of a desirable *parti* from the grandmother's point of view; beyond that the Flauberts scarcely knew him. Caroline herself felt no attraction for him at all. Writing to his dear Caro from Paris in December 1863, this is how Gustave tried to help:

> So, my poor Caro, you're still in the same uncertainty and perhaps now after a third meeting, you've advanced no further? It's such a serious decision to make that I'd be in exactly the same state were I in your pretty skin. Look, think, explore yourself heart and soul, try to discover whether this gentleman can offer you any chance of happiness. Human life feeds on more than poetic ideas and exalted sentiments. But on the other hand if bourgeois existence kills you with boredom, what to do? Your poor grandmother wants you to marry, fearing to leave you alone in the world, and I too, dear Caro, should like to see you united with a decent young man who would make you as happy as possible. The other night, when I saw you crying so bitterly, your distress nearly broke my heart. We love you dearly, my darling, and the day of your marriage will not be a happy one for your two old companions . . . .
>
> So you see I can't even pretend to advise you. What speaks well for M. Commanville is the way he has gone about things. Moreover we are acquainted with his character, his background and connections, things it would be next to impossible to know in a Paris milieu. Here in Paris you might find young men who are more brilliant: but charm—*l'agrément*—is almost exclusively the property of bohemians. Now the idea of my poor niece being married to a man without means is so dreadful that I won't consider it for a moment. Yes, my darling, I declare I'd rather see you marry a millionaire philistine than an indigent genius. For the genius wouldn't be merely poor, he would be brutal and tyrannical, and make you suffer to the point of madness or idiocy.
>
> . . . I am like you, you see, I don't know what to think . . . .
>
> It will be hard for you to find a husband who is your superior in mind and upbringing. If I knew one who had those qualifications and met all other requirements I'd set off and secure him for you very quickly. So you are faced with having to take a young man of good character who is nevertheless inferior . . . . Will you be able to live happily with him? . . . You'll doubtless be badgered to give a quick answer. Don't do anything in a hurry. And whatever happens, my poor Loulou, you know you can depend on the affection of your old uncle who sends you a kiss.

Clearly, the Flauberts knew next to nothing about M. Commanville apart from his statistical qualifications. But Caroline, at seventeen, was in the marriage market and must take the best that offered. Why the haste? Her foster-parents were far from poor. But the grandmother, from an overzealous sense of responsibility, and for her own peace of mind, wanted to see the girl settled; and Gustave, fond as he was of his pretty little Caro, went along with her. And he evidently dreaded the idea of Caro becoming a financial liability, an emotional problem, quite as much for his own sake as for hers. The note of hypocrisy in his letter—"I don't want to push you, but I suppose I must"—is unmistakable.

Four months later, Caroline married Commanville. And within half a dozen years Flaubert was to find that he had invited a nemesis into his own life. Ernest proved to be a dull, narrow, negative, and calculating individual. George Sand, a fair enough judge of character when her own emotions were not involved, disliked him on sight, after meeting him on her visits to the Flaubert family. Worse still, he proved to be a financial failure. His business was so badly hit by the Franco-Prussian War that he never managed to recover, or devise other resources. So poor Caro was reduced after all to a life of desperate financial emergency. A recessive, reticent character, she cannot but have felt a lifelong resentment at having been driven into such a marriage and her behavior, from this time on, must have been

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dictated by the need to make her much loved uncle feel the consequences of what he had helped to bring about. A "dutiful" wife, she became in business matters the passive instrument of the husband she could not like, and through her he filled Flaubert's later years with financial anxiety and humiliation. Perhaps from a sense of guilt on her own part, his mother, who died in 1872, bequeathed the family home at Croisset to Caroline, on the condition that Gustave have the use of it for his lifetime. So Flaubert could be made to feel that he was a resident on sufferance of a property which belonged to the Commanvilles. And by way of Caroline he could be plied with endless demands for help. He was prevailed on to ask his one-time society patroness, Princesse Mathilde Bonaparte, now an exile in Belgium, to make a business loan to Commanville. (Her advisers, having examined Ernest's position, warned her not to.) Flaubert was even forced to sell property of his own quickly and below its market value to save his nephew-in-law from the horrors of bankruptcy (which would have been the wiser choice, according to some financial advisers). This and many other deals, propositions, and notices entailed an immense amount of legal and business correspondence, and Commanville ensured that Flaubert should have the weight of it by the daily post.

Financial and legal complications always roused Flaubert to hysteria. He felt that a sufficiency of money ought to flow without question, as it had throughout his earlier life. Apart from being careful about spending it, one shouldn't have to bother one's head about money. As a consequence he could be cheated by Michel Lévy (that hard-nosed publisher who so victimized Baudelaire) over his dues for *Madame Bovary*. And he could even entrust Commanville with the charge of his own financial affairs, so that Ernest managed easily enough to help himself to Gustave's capital from time to time without detection.

But whatever the financial upsets of his last years—and the whole tale reads like the consequential plot of an Ibsen play—how fortunately placed he was, compared with many another writer of his time! He always resented having the fact pointed out to him. But compare his lot with that of Mallarmé, living out a sentence of twenty-five years of dread and drudgery, teaching in a children's school (and he must have been, to add to his misery, a most incompetent teacher). Or Baudelaire's lot, with the hag of debt, poverty, and hackwork forever riding his shoulder, a wailful childish mother to placate, and a mistress as demanding of money as the horseleech's daughter. Flaubert, by contrast, who determined that Louise Colet should in no sense be a kept woman, was a parsimonious lover: however needy Louise might be, financial help, apart from one or two small loans, was not on.

How would Flaubert have fared, I wonder, if he'd been thrown on the rocks of necessity in his twenties? Either he'd have been a very different writer, or else no writer at all. Perhaps it was to compensate for the luck of financial security, and to answer the family reproaches of "idleness," that he felt compelled to show, to insist on, the hardness of the lot he had chosen for himself. Did any other writer ever insist so much or descant so endlessly on his creative agonies, problems, boredom, and despairs? The letters must be a fair indication of how much he talked and talked about this: and thanks to the Goncourt brothers, for example, who reported with awe how it was *true* that he worked for fourteen hours a day, he became famous, even notorious in his own lifetime for his frenzied dedication to the sheer laboriousness of his art. And for a generation of posthumous admirers and followers he became the sanctified martyr of letters, the ruthless perfectionist, the unremitting devotee of Beauty and the *mot juste*, so much so that the *idea* of Flaubert exalted and falsified the view of his works. It would be difficult now to see *Madame Bovary* as being either "perfect" or "beautiful": there are passages too much rewritten to hold much life in them, descriptions of environment too systematically itemized to be evocative, and there are minor characters who are only

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mechanical sketches. Even Emma's lovers, Rodolphe and Leon, are a little too much like contrasted two-dimensional types. Flaubert never had that vital gift of the great novelist, of somehow conveying that he knows more about his characters than he chooses to say.

St. Simeon Stylites may not hold a very high place in the church calendar, apart from the physical eminence he chose for his self-mortifications. But there's no record of him swarming down his column of a dark night and slipping away to enjoy the most riotous pleasures of downtown. Flaubert, on the other hand, took more than one holiday away from the travails of the written word and the hermetic solitude of Croisset. First, there was Paris and Louise Colet. His earlier letters to her are more lust- than love-letters, and what tenderness they have arises from satisfaction had or anticipated. Later there were the joys of travel: his letters from the Middle East to Louis Bouilhet, the friend of his heart and faithful, indispensable critic and counselor of his work, show how he guzzled and gormandized his oriental pleasures. "At Esna in one day," he tells him, "I fired five times, and sucked three. I say it straight out and without circumlocution, and let me add that I enjoyed it." And he enjoyed no end of this and other satisfactions. In the next letter to Bouilhet he counsels him: "Don't do too much fornicating, conserve your strength, an ounce of sperm lost is worse than ten pounds of blood. By the way, you ask me if I consummated that other business at the baths. [That is, with one of the boy attendants.] Yes—and on a pock-marked young rascal wearing a white turban. It made me laugh, that's all. But I'll be at it again. To be done well, an experiment must be repeated."

Flaubert at home had been an early visitor to the brothel. After all, the brothel was having its golden age in France, and elsewhere, in the later nineteenth century. It seems as though every fifteen-year-old lad of prosperous family background dreamed of his first visit, if he wasn't, like Gustave, already an initiate. It was celebrated by writers like Maupassant, and by a bevy of artists including Constantin Guys, Degas, and Lautrec. In far away, insulated Japan, too, the brothel on a much more eleaborate scale was having its golden era, but there it was tinctured with culture: the top-class courtesan had to be a conversational expert, well-versed in art and poetry, an exemplar of fastidious taste, as well as a sexual gymnast. Above all, in Japan the brothel was free of disease. In Europe, unfortunately, one of the presiding emblems of the age might have been Felicien Rops's lithographic image, *Mors Syphilitica*—a red-eyed, skeletal, loose-draped prostitute with a warning scythe at her shoulder. Venereal disease in one form or another was said to be as common as the cold, and treatment was still in its primitive stages. Flaubert was early infected, and it was probably the chief cause of his sudden death at fifty-nine, as it certainly was of Maupassant's at forty-three. Jules de Goncourt was another victim at an early age, as Baudelaire had been. How many must there have been among names of no eminence?

Flaubert was fortunate, too, in beginning his published career with his masterwork, *Madame Bovary*. It created an *éclat* greater than anything of his that followed. And its prosecution in 1857 proved to be nothing but a boost to its sales and popularity, whereas Baudelaire's book was suppressed. It was the 1861 edition of that work which had the transforming impact on Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and a whole series of poets to follow. In fact its influence on poetry as a whole was fully equal to that of Cézanne's on painting. Baudelaire remains the first among modern poets. Can the same be said of Flaubert among novelists? He had his influence as a realist on Zola, Maupassant. But on Proust for instance? Scarcely at all. The Flaubertian ideal of the narrator as an impassive god invisible in his fiction was taken up and became a pose, chiefly on the part of writers who had nothing much to restrain anyway. To my mind, *Madame Bovary* can best be seen as yet another link in the long chain of French novels and plays,

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otherwise heterogeneous, centered on the interpretation of *la femme*: beginning with *La Princesse de Clèves* and the passionate, virulent heroines of Racine: Hermione, Bérénice, Roxane, Phédre, Athalie, for whom each play is a frame; then, in the next century, Manon Lescaut, so remote from Emma Bovary but as helplessly dedicated to pleasure and doomed by its consequences; *La Religieuse,* and her opposite, the monstrous Madame de Mertheuil, who dominates *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*; then, in the nineteenth century, Adolphe and Carmen, and on the more tender side, Murger's Mimi and the younger Dumas's Marguerite, both immortalized in indestructible operas, like Carmen herself.

The historical novel, it seems to me, is the grand temptation of the novelist; the further away in time, the more it proves a trap. George Eliot's *Romola* and Dickens's two essays in the genre fall below their other work. *War and Peace* triumphs because for much the greater part of its length it is based on memories that had bitten deep into the Russian consciousness and were still a live tradition in Tolstoy's youth. It is only when Tolstoy closes in on Napoleon toward the end that his work takes on the quality of a historical novel and begins to falter. In revulsion against the Bovary-bourgeois world and "la vie de province," Flaubert drove himself to a preposterous extreme of contrast; a plan to dig up and revitalize the dead and almost obliterated culture of ancient Carthage. With *Salammbô* begin the years of ceaseless, slaving research that became a mania for the rest of the novelist's career. The practice seems to be based on the assumption that the merit of a given work is in direct proportion to the amount of labor that goes into it. True, if only up to a point, of a work of history, but not of a work of fiction. For *Salammbô* alone, Flaubert must have read and sifted through as much material as Gibbon did for his *Decline and Fall.* Gibbon's three-page portrait of the Empress Theodora is much more alive and suggestive than Flaubert's laborious evocation of his heroine. The book in fact is a centaur, neither history nor fiction, but a portentous amalgam of both. It was attacked for its historical inaccuracies and vehemently defended by its author on the same score. *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* carries too great a load of research material to convey anything much in the way of imaginative or dramative conviction.

A regular pattern now asserts itself in Flaubert's writing career: the herculean struggle with each novel in turn, always with the insistence that he, the writer, must be absent as a god in it, followed by the naïve discovery that his subject was none other than—himself! He *was* Salammbô, and in a different set of clothes he was St. Anthony. "Instead of St. Anthony it was I in that book." And in his last years he returned to a long cherished scheme: a novel about two retired bourgeois in a country retreat who devoted all their time to researching one important subject after another, leaving no page unturned in their zeal to attain perfect knowledge and then, in their deductions and conclusions, always *getting it wrong.* Flaubert must have known how much he had in common with Messieurs Bouvard and Pécuchet, but he still felt compelled to behave exactly like them. He assures a correspondent that for this novel—never to be finished—he has already accumulated an eight-inch-thick pile of notes and has read through fifteen hundred volumes. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is the torso of a splendid comic novel; but who knows, with a load of five hundred more volumes, the author might have spoilt it.

As revealed in these letters and the accounts of friends, Flaubert himself emerges as a great comic, or tragicomic character: a comedian in spite of himself, vehement, voluble, perpetually enraged, self-obsessed, muddled, regularly but tardily finding himself out, and then beginning the whole frenetic performance again; and never for one moment attaining the dispassionate, godlike personality he yearned to be. In person he was impressive, and perhaps slightly comic as well: magnetic certainly to some

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women, a big man but not tall, broad in the shoulders and the beam, with a leonine head, a lifted scornful chin, and indignant eyes. George Sand, abandoning her usual "flowing style" for brief diary notes, gives us a telling portrait of him on a holiday visit to Nohant in 1872 dressing up as a woman to join in the fun and games, but then "as always impatient, exacerbated, wanting party games to stop so that we can talk literature." He "talks with animation and humor, but all to do with himself. Turgenev, who is much more interesting, can hardly get a word in." Then two days later: "I am tired, *worn out,* by my dear Flaubert. I love him very much . . . but his personality is too obstreperous. He exhausts us."

Francis Steegmuller's selection has many advantages over a complete letters, or a full-scale biography. It gives us in effect, through their letters, journals, and comments, a series of self-portraits of George Sand, Maxime du Camp, and many others. The notes and the linking passages of narrative explanation are a pleasure in themselves, and with the main contents they give us a shrewd and lucid vista on the whole period. A pity, though, that Mr. Steegmuller didn't include a reproduction of Courbet's magnificent portrait of Louise Colet en Amazone, instead of the two doll-like effigies he did include. Courbet gives us the real Louise, and this I feel is how Emma Bovary must have looked in her riding habit on her outings with Rodolphe. While Louise was in receipt of all Flaubert's agonized confidences about the problems of writing his novel, I suspect he must have been drawing on his immediate memories of her looks, style, and gestures in order to evoke those of his heroine, with a fresh and sensuous spontaneity which is rare in his work.

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Theater

Shakespeare, Joe's contemporary

by Mimi Kramer

While tripping lightly through Carol Lawson's "Broadway" column one morning in early April, I came upon the news that *Henry V* is a jingoistic play. That's what it said: that Joseph Papp had changed his plans for this year's New York Shakespeare Festival and Kevin Kline was going to play Richard III in Central Park this summer instead of Henry V because:

> [the] director, Jane Howell, who is British, does not like *Henry V*. "She feels it is a jingoistic play, and since Britain was recently involved in Falklands, it is an anathema to her at this time," Mr. Papp explains.

Being one of those who find merriment hard to come by at breakfast, I was grateful to Jane Howell. Still, it seemed a shame. *Richard III* is great fun, but *Henry V* is an awfully good play, arguably a much better play than *Richard III*. And *Henry V* is rarely ever done in New York. Among producers it isn't really considered a huge box-office draw. Then, too, it requires a rather large cast of consummate classical actors capable of simulating the accents of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, France, and Eastcheap, among much else. It's just the sort of play the New York stage no longer seems to know quite what to do with, if it ever did. But this year Joe Papp was bringing in a pro, a British director named Jane Howell. She had a solid Shakespearean background and many productions of the history plays to her name. What a pity, then, that Britain should have had to become involved in the Falklands!

Of course one knows what Howell thinks she means by calling *Henry V* jingoistic. She means that *Henry V* is about a king who, in a time of civil strife, successfully unites his nation under a warlike banner. This aspect of the play makes her squeamish. But that is her private concern and should have remained so. To suggest that *Henry V* ("God for Harry, England and St. George!") is any more patriotic than any of the other history plays—say, *Richard II* ("This happy breed of men, this little world / This precious stone set in the silver sea")—is to misunderstand the fundamental premises underlying Shakespeare's political thinking.

To be sure, Shakespeare's historical plays do take certain things as given: that England is a good idea, that war is a political reality, and that kingship is, more or less, here to stay. That having been said, however, it is not the case that in Shakespeare's book anything goes that's good for England or good for England's king. If Harry makes war before he makes love, he spends an extraordinary amount of his time and the audience's trying to determine whether or not that war is one that he can wage "with right and conscience":

> For God doth know how many now in health
> Shall drop their blood in approbation
> Of what your reverence shall incite us to.

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> Therefore take heed how you impawn our person,
> How you awake our sleeping sword of war:
> We charge you, in the name of God, take heed;
> For never two such countries did contend
> Without much fall of blood . . .

And if he decides to go ahead with the thing, and the play contains that rousing call to arms—". . . But we in it shall be remembered; / We few, we happy few, we band of brothers . . ."—it also boasts one of the most eloquent anti-war statements in the language:

> But if the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make; when all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day, and cry all, "We died at such a place"; some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afeard there are few die well that die in a battle; for how can they charitably dispose of any thing when blood is their argument?

This question—from a common soldier unwittingly addressing his sovereign and commander—is never answered. And though the king goes on to chop logic with his men, debating over certain niceties of Christian ethics, the passage stands as one of the most haunting in the play.

It is strange that Howell, with "a *Henry V* in her past," should have forgotten this and been guilty of such an intellectual and imaginative failure. Apparently she tried to bring the same quality of thought to her production of *Richard III*:

> With Shakespeare, I try to understand what the rules of the play are, historic research, if you like. Then you have to look in terms of your own day. What grew in me very much in New York, which is a heightened version of London, was the sense of materialism that is abroad, an awful push in both our countries—everyone driving over people to get what they want.

Oh dear, how dull! The old "novel" approach again, the Papp approach: that distortion of the concept of "Shakespeare, Our Contemporary" first expressed by the Polish critic Jan Kott in 1964. The whole point of Kott's book—which has probably had more influence, both good and bad, on the modern production of Shakespeare than any other work of scholarship—was to demonstrate not the ways in which Shakespeare could be made to look like "our contemporary" but the ways in which he was inherently so.

Richard III is not an anti-materialistic play any more than *Henry V* is a "jingoistic" one. In fact, if anyone should feel inclined to judge the political content of an Elizabethan play in the political terms of our own day, then the play Howell elected to produce is far more explicitly "propagandistic" than the one she rejected out of delicacy. *Henry V,* celebrating the idea of kingship with its glorified picture of "the mirror of all Christian kings," was only indirectly a compliment to Elizabeth I. *Richard III,* however, was an out-and-out piece of political toadying, for the figure glorified as England's saint and savior in *Richard* is Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, the future Henry VII and grandfather to Elizabeth herself.

Of course to characterize Shakespeare's plays this way is nonsense; the truth is more complex than that and Shakespeare's philosophy is fortunately not the threadbare object that the Papps and Howells of this world would have us think. If Shakespeare's histories are concerned with kingship that is partly because his age was obsessed with kingship and the figure of the monarch. *Il Principe, A Myrrour For Magistrates,* and the various chronicles Shakespeare used for sources all shared an interest in teaching the proper virtue of the monarch and in discovering whether it differed in nature from the virtue of the private citizen. With respect to these themes, Shakespeare was certainly a product of his age.

But Shakespeare's interest was also in the limits of good and bad human action, the extreme forms which good and evil

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can take. For the playwright's purposes the king was simply that figure in whose house actions had most resonance. For reasons Aristotle tried to define, tragedy was concerned with kingship because in the person of the king we could see, writ large, the consequences and responsibilities which vice and virtue entailed. If this had not been so then no one, you can be sure, would ever have heard of Arthur Miller; for where would the novelty have been in the notion that "attention must finally be paid" to another sort of man?

Richard III and *Henry V* show us, respectively, the worst and best in kingship: Henry is the hero-king and Richard the prince "determined to prove a villain." As we watch Richard limp and cackle, dragging his crooked back about the stage, seducing the woman he will murder, setting Hastings and the queen's kinsmen against each other, engineering the murders of his brother and small nephews, as we watch him playacting and murdering his way to the throne, we are drawn to him by more than a horrid fascination. Richard is seductive: there's no getting away from it. He's not nice and he's not pretty, but that is the *tour de force*: that Shakespeare can make him so attractive in spite of all the nasty things he is doing. It is the flip-side of the *tour de force* in *Henry V,* where Harry is the king whose actions we must approve of and admire in spite of sometimes almost hating him for what he has to do.

On one of those days in July when the great rains came, the Delacorte box office did not yet know at seven o'clock whether or not the curtain would rise on *Richard III* at seven-thirty. They must have come to a decision while I was en route, however, for as I approached the Belvedere Castle I heard the strains of Richard's opening soliloquy:

> Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
> Have no delight to pass away the time
> Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
> And descant on mine own deformity.

It was the place where many productions splice in a speech of twenty lines or so from *Henry VI, Part Three,* and I expected to hear the usual interpolation. It never came: Kevin Kline went straight on with *Richard III* proper. It was the keynote of the evening: a straight production of the Folio text with only one or two cuts and no interpolations.

On the stage was one of those fadeaway sets: a huge castle whose rough and ragged edges rather incongruously suggested an ancient ruin, as though to remind us that this was history and that we should keep one foot firmly planted in the modern era so as not to lose perspective. A single drummer dressed in doublet and hose stood on a sort of catwalk-rampart and behind him hung a couple of tapestries. One seemed to depict a graveyard plot and the other bore a skeleton with the motto: "The mirror that flatters not." The tapestries seemed to have no point other than a sort of recognition that we were vaguely in the Elizabethan era. They would have been highly appropriate to a production of *Hamlet* or *The Duchess of Malfi,* but they had nothing to do with the play we had all come to see.

Settling into my seat, I looked to see what they had done to make Kevin Kline into a lump of foul deformity. There he was: Sophie's Nathan with a tragic limp, a quantity of five-o'clock shadow, and just the slightest hump. Oh yes, one arm hung useless at his belt. As though it had been tied there.

For the purposes of Shakespeare's play Richard's deformities are more than a bid for historical accuracy. If Richard is a physical cripple it is because he is a moral cripple: his monstrous shape is merely the concrete expression of the degree to which he has denatured his humanity, the degree to which his savagery exists apart from the moral laws that should govern it. In the scene in which Richard persuades the Lady Anne over the corpse of her father-in-law to ignore his murder of her husband and come to his bed anyway, it is not helpful for us to be thinking, "Don't be a fool, Annie! What do you want to give him such a hard time for?"

If Kevin Kline played the Duke of Glou-

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cester well in the early soliloquies, that is a credit to his technique, but it does not make him a great actor: at least early on, the role is a comparatively easy one. Any actor above a certain level of competence would have a hard time playing it badly. A character who takes the audience into his confidence so freely, inviting them to delight in the intricacies of his malice and hypocrisy does not require much more than a moderate sense of comic timing and intelligence, and a familiarity with the narcissism of the actor-personality. Kline certainly has these.

Nor is there much for the director to do in the first section of the play. He can rely on the actor playing Richard to win the audience over to his villainy and the actor, in turn, can rely largely on the text. But with the King's death toward the end of Act II both actor and director have their work cut out for them. So far we have been with Richard every step of the way. In addition to being far and away the most attractive character on stage no matter what he does, in everything he *has* done Richard has made us his accomplices by making us privy to his plans and couching them in terms of seductive irony. But when Richard and Buckingham are left alone on stage at the end of Scene 2, we discover that Richard has another confidant.

> My other self, my counsel's consistory,
> My oracle, my prophet, my dear cousin . . .

What's this? we think. Who is this fellow Buckingham? Until now, he has been practically indistinguishable from all the other Dukes and Lords. If Richard has a "second self" in Buckingham, we think, then he scarcely needs us! It is a double slight: we have not been told of Buckingham before and we find ourselves supplanted in Richard's confidence.

This is the beginning of our dissociation from Richard. From here on he will begin to do things without telling us beforehand and we will watch him without feeling so much a part of the action. Richard's remaining soliloquies and asides will, for the most part, be directed at himself, not us. And as our active involvement in the comic side of Richard's nature begins to decrease, he should begin to look a little more like some of those epithets hurled at him by his family and acquaintances: "a bloody tyrant and a homicide," "Hell's black intelligencer," "that foul defacer of God's handiwork," the "troubler of the poor world's peace."

Kevin Kline resembled none of these things. But one had the impression he had not been asked to. He went on being charming and accessible through the arrest and murder of the queen's family, the framing and execution of Hastings, the duping of the Lord Mayor of London, the betrayal of Buckingham, and the murder of the princes in the tower.

Attractive as Richard is, there are certainly scenes in which we are meant to feel critical of him, however fascinated we are by his villainy: in the "strawberries scene," for instance, in which Richard ambles into a council meeting asking for some strawberries, confers with Buckingham for a moment, and then turns back to the council accusing Hastings's wife of having crippled him with witchcraft. As played by Kline, Richard did not seem to be doing anything in the least unreasonable. Or the scene in which Richard, having murdered the queen's two small sons, approaches her with a request for her daughter's hand in marriage. This scene could have been exquisite. In the long and repetitive *agon* between Richard and Elizabeth, Concetta Tomei gave the peevish queen a tragic stature and perfectly conveyed her moral ascendancy. This is the one confrontation in which Richard—to his mounting frustration—is not explicitly able to practice a deception, in which he is forced to come out in the open and say, "Look, I am going to marry your daughter because I am a tyrant and because, for various political reasons, it is expedient for me." But Howell seemed to have missed this point entirely: Kline almost rushed through this speech and manifested only the most well-behaved annoyance.

In other parts of the play Howell was

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apparently more attentive, and her expertise as a director was more in evidence. The performances of the children—crucial to any production of *Richard III*—were especially revealing in this regard.

American child-actors are notoriously cute. And Shakespeare's stage-children are already cute to begin with: They know too much but don't know enough to keep quiet about it. Their precocity tends to manifest itself in recherché Elizabethan puns which a modern audience may find more irritating than endearing. "So wise so young, they say, do never live long," says Richard. And, sure enough, the lives of Shakespeare's stage-children are mercifully brief: the smart-aleck toddlers of *Macbeth, King John, Henry V,* and *The Winter's Tale* all die violently, like their little cousins in *Richard III.*

The murder of the princes provides the moral fulcrum on which the play turns and an obnoxious pair of princes can send a production of *Richard III* toppling probably faster than any other single weakness. The princes in Howell's production must have been all of nine and fourteen, but they understood their lines and delivered them intelligently. Moreover, they were completely free of that quality of self-consciousness that makes you want to stamp and whistle when Richard says, "I wish the bastards dead." The rest of the company behaved like properly premodern people, exhibiting only the most restrained indulgence toward the children; and the collective reaction to little York's off-color joke about his uncle's posture was chillingly understated. The only explanation for this kind of ensemble acting was direction. Howell had trained those children and assembled a true cast of players—not method actors and musical comedy stars, but players in the best sense of the word.

There were a few important casualties, however. Lady Anne—whose accents came too close to Barbara Stanwyck for comfort—was a disaster and the tragic figure of Hastings was grossly misplayed as a buffoon. Rather than the "deep-revolving, witty Buckingham" of Richard's acquaintance, we encountered a shallow smoothie of whose dreams and genius we were given no inkling. And no one was helped by Howell's staging. The play seemed almost entirely unblocked and what few staging ideas there were—some comic business over the papers containing Clarence's order for execution, Hastings's wife appearing as a mute character, Richard's sliding down a pole or bellrope, and the melodramatic choreography of Richard's death scene—seemed to have been inspired less by the muse than by Olivier's film version of the play.

The biggest casualty was Howell's overall conception of the play, reflected in her portrayal of Richmond and a final closing comment. Richmond is probably one of the most difficult parts in the play. He is shockingly underwritten and dull as ditchwater. He has almost no personality to speak of and everyone else in the play is continually going on about what a prize he is. After Richard's pyrotechnics there is scarcely any way that Richmond can be played so as to appear Richard's equal in our interest and attention. In Howell's production Richmond was played as a southern preacher, as slow and effeminate as a long, slow, sweet summer's day. When he pronounced his call to arms he turned to face the audience:

> Sound, drums, and trumpets, boldly and cheerfully!
> God, and Saint George! Richmond and victory!

Believe me: this man you would not have followed to a Fourth of July sale at Macy's. The woman behind me was very involved in the play. When Richard, in his darkest hour the night before the battle, soliloquized his guilt—

> There is no creature loves me,
> And if I die, no soul will pity me . . .

—she made a soft "hmn!" noise. You could tell that she was really going to miss the guy. But when Lord Stanley presented the crown to Richmond, England's redeemer, she

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muttered, "Jerk!" And with good reason.

I have down in my notes: "Richmond—paperbag," a sort of shorthand for "Richmond couldn't act his way out of a paperbag." Which is interesting because several pages earlier I also have down, "Second Murderer damn good!" and both were played by David Alan Grier. Richmond's pathetic performance had obviously not been an index of the actor's capability: Howell had expressly wanted Richmond played that way.

Among the array of choices that Shakespeare offers up, each a possible answer to the question of what sort of man should be king, a mild, peace-loving figure with the soul of a monk is not one of them. In fact that is precisely the possibility he rejects in the three Henry VI plays in the tetralogy that *Richard III* concludes. Richmond may be dull, but he is certainly forceful and efficient. Moreover, he is England's savior, rescuing her from four generations of chaos and civil strife. But as Howell's production of *Richard III* ended and the lights went down on the newly crowned Richmond talking of peace and a restoration of order, a hollow laugh rang out in the theater. There, on the edge of the stage, stood Margaret, the hag-like Fury and figure of prophecy, giving the lie to the optimism of the dimming tableau before us.

By undercutting Richmond and the fundamental Elizabethan values he represents—essentially the only original idea that Howell brought to her staging of the play—Howell managed to distort both the play and the delicate mechanism of moral conflict that Shakespeare had intended for it to have. A modern audience sitting in the comparative security of Central Park may have trouble seeing much danger in the deposition of a king or a false syllogism. But it has no trouble growing fond of a witty and charismatic character whose moral stance is—the playwright gives us every reason to know and to try to forget—a perversion of some essential value, the sovereignty of life, say, or of language. To acclaim Richard at the expense of Richmond, as Howell's production does, is to ease the tension between our emotional impulses and what we know our moral judgments should be. It is to make Shakespeare our contemporary with a vengeance, and in the context of the modern theater, that, surely, is the final "act of tragic violence."

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Art

Holbein's visit to America

by Creighton Gilbert

"Britain Salutes New York," which brought a multitude of art exhibitions and other cultural events to New York City in the spring and summer, was a giant institutional ad, the kind of promotion that works to evoke a pleasant climate and never mentions the sponsor's wish to do business. Nothing served the "Salute's" purposes better than the many exhibitions of English art; they proved that the event was cultural but they also sent a direct, if subliminal, message about the advantages of touring England. Countries that block export of their national art miss a great chance. When Greece lost the Elgin marbles, and when a century ago the French started selling to Americans the Impressionist paintings that no rational Frenchman would pay for, they inadvertently set up one of their most effective enticements to foreign travellers, while still retaining (in both cases) enough analogous art work to fill their own museums. (Unfortunately, both countries have now reversed these policies.) At the very least, the "Britain Salutes New York" extravaganza made the arrangements for grand loans of English artists like Constable and Moore much easier than usual, to the happiness of New York museums.[1]

The drawings of Hans Holbein, the subject of a recent exhibition at the Morgan Library, are an even happier beneficiary of "Britain Salutes New York."[2] We have seen major presentations of Constable and Moore before, but the Holbeins are a genuine first. They are all lent by the Queen, whose role in promoting Britain in a classy way is surely as unmatchable as it is her solidest function. The Morgan Library has lately joined the museum trend toward marketing its shows, dropping (no doubt for real financial reasons) its image as an oasis known to few but not dropping its standards. Thus the British curators could go ahead with no qualms about the care here. The drawings were shown with correctly low levels of lighting and in plain, rather than jazzy, installation; the Morgan provided lots of rich public information, too. The museum deserves special commendation for including a substantial if plain catalogue in the price of admission (it has done this before), well thought out to absorb most of the common questions about the exhibition. (It seems to have negotiated this from its corporate angel.) Other museums charge extra for their catalogues, which tend to extend beyond most people's needs and to preen.

But Holbein fits the "Salute" even more because Holbein's art, unlike that of the

1 "Constable's England" will be on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art through September 4; "The World of Henry Moore: Sixty Years of his Art," through September 25.

2 "Holbein and the Court of Henry VIII" was shown at the Morgan Library in New York from April 21 through July 30.

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other "visiting" English artists, strikes a chord with more than just art people. It really is about England, and the visitors to the exhibition responded by bringing up their lore of Henry VIII's wives and of the Thomas More of *A Man for All Seasons*. Two men straight out of a Louis Auchincloss law firm were looking at Bishop Fisher and some other faces: "This is the one that perjured himself and sent his buddies to the Tower." The other: "This is one of the guys that went to the Tower." They were really in comfortable rapport with the drawings. And they were justified, despite the fact that Henry himself is not among these portraits (nor are most of his wives or children) and that quite obscure people are in the large majority. Art historians have used the same approach: a banner outside rightly promises "Holbein and the Court of Henry VIII," the catalogue concentrates on biography, and inside the museum one can buy a book of paper dolls of Henry and the wives in color. Only a mad formalist would do it otherwise, when we are confronted with nothing but faces, most of them tied to records of names, and when the most obvious thing Holbein has done is to make them all totally separate individuals, as unlike one another as our friends. But when one probes for how Holbein did it, some of the answers may be unexpected.

It is surely curious that this image of England was provided by a mature foreigner. To be sure, one remembers that in other cases, too, notably Van Dyck's Stuarts and Handel's *Messiah,* the English have readily compensated for big native gaps by making foreign artists represent them decisively. Holbein, like other foreign artists on English soil, started what was to become a major local tradition: in this case, he made portraiture of the socially prominent the chief form of painting. But he enjoyed an advantage. Unlike Constable, for instance, Holbein is the sort of artist for whom "place" is not critical. He had after all left home at eighteen to make a career in Basel, in the world of book publishers, whose cosmopolitanism is best illustrated by the role played in it by the Dutch author Erasmus. Holbein's themes—not only faces but the illustrations for books and the decorations for festivals—are the kind that can be moved anywhere, and when exported they are not meant to benefit by any flavor of local origin. (They visit America easily, too.) But it is not only that Holbein is urban and detached, with subjects the opposite of Constable's Suffolk water and clouds. Even his style is unhooked from any region, contrary to art historical principles. True, he probably is more like German artists than others—or perhaps like some Flemish artists, such as Matsys—but perhaps he is only like those of them who had taken up Italian modes. It is worth a fresh look.

Most art historians recognize that they owe such "fresh looks" to phenomena like the "Salute." Unlike museum paintings, drawings naturally live in dark boxes, and they are usually seen only by those doing specific Holbein research. Exhibitions like this make them accessible in the original to our eye and memory in the way paintings routinely are; otherwise we are responding to reproductions, and the reproductions of drawings are especially deceptive, tempting us to believe they are accurate when they are not.

Of course, to see Holbein's drawings is, for the most part, to reinforce what the specialists have told us about their history. The sharp break between two groups is conspicuous. The first, small series is from Holbein's brief visit in 1527, when he arrived with an introduction from his friend Erasmus, already famous for *In Praise of Folly* and much else, to Erasmus's friend Thomas More, famous for *Utopia* and much else. Holbein was a guest at More's house and painted chiefly his family. The second large series is from his return in 1532 to his death in London in 1543. He came to work for north German traders, but in 1536 became Henry VIII's court painter. It was in the same year that Henry beheaded More, who had in the interim been promoted to the position of chief minister. Both groups of drawings function as preliminary sketches

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for paintings commissioned by the subjects, who were too busy to give more than one sitting. In about three hours Holbein had to get all the features right, like a surveyor on a site visit. Concerning the differences between the groups, everyone notices that in the second the paper has been prepared with a pink priming (the average of flesh color) while the earlier ones are mostly on normal white paper (a couple of sheets are argued over) and often involve several colored chalks for costume elements. It is evident that later the busy and successful artist was using time-saving devices. It is probable that he used the mechanical aid of doing the first drawing on a pane of glass, through which he looked at the posing sitter (an eyepiece was attached to prevent him from shifting his viewpoint). The first sketch in an oily medium got transferred to paper by rubbing and was then reworked and detailed freehand. Dürer describes the method, with disapproval, as something for unconfident artists. But we may see the Holbein of this second phase in a tradition that leads not to Rembrandt but to the portrait photographers, from D. O. Hill to Karsh. They too produced the most effective records of the socially important, using all possible technical supports; they too were allowed only one sitting but during it demanded a similar fixity from the sitters. As to style, it is striking that the later series is very economical in its few, firm, lines, in constrast to the elaboration and even tentativeness of the softer surfaces of the earlier drawings. The hard lines of the later ones have induced much argument as to how much reworking they have undergone by later hands; everyone agrees that there has been some.

But it seems to me that the later series is different in a further way, not brought out in the usual praise of their real immediacy (which they have) and their "psychological depth of characterization" (which I doubt). Rather, nearly all seem to offer blank expressions, masks not marked by experiences or habit. As support I would point to the three-year-old prince, later Edward VI, who has no less presence than anyone else here. As another, I would cite John Colet, whom the narrator of a movie accompanying the exhibition praises in the usual way—for being lifelike. (I think much of the comment about character may be an automatic formula for telling us these are good portraits we ought to like.) Yet it has recently been proved that the head of Colet, a friend of More who had died long before Holbein arrived, is copied from his tomb sculpture. It is one of several known cases in which brilliant Renaissance artists—first of all Titian—worked up great portraits from dead materials. But certainly the life they gave them is essentially physical.

That these should be live but empty faces is right; that may indeed be their character. For most of the people were court office holders, quite minor ones often, evidently much involved in the (extremely violent) struggles for place and favor. It was a world in which it was good to have one's portrait done by Holbein. The only drawing that happens to have had its surface colored all over the costume and background has rightly been used in the exhibition poster, cropped to concentrate on the head: the sitter fixes us with his right eye in a million New York locations, often in a repeating row, with the tremendous effect of a stare we cannot avoid. He was probably just holding the pose, watching the birdie. This man was simply somebody in the "office of common meter of precious stuffs," that is, he inspected luxury cloths, a job he got, it seems, because the powerful minister Thomas Cromwell was a friend of his father's. But such jobs were probably sinecures, with clerks doing the work. Holbein's sitters were not so much like civil servants as like people who get appointments on state commissions. Such empty faces appear today in newspaper photographs of groups seen at a table at the correct discotheque. Only one of the later drawings seems to evoke thoughtful experience, that of Thomas Elyot, who had just published his notable book *The Governor,* a theory of education. If he also sits with a fixed expression, we seem to know that he takes the opportunity for some relaxed medi-

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tation. We might expect more from the poets Wyatt and Surrey, but we do not get it. The only artist type Surrey's absolutely frontal poker face suggests is Andy Warhol in provocative blankness. That we tend to think of Wyatt and Surrey primarily as poets might have seemed a distortion to them; they were courtiers, too, champions at sonnet-writing as others were at fencing. (Their poems were not printed during their lives.) Perhaps the only cluster of later drawings that evoke character are those of the toughs, the soldier Poyntz and Southwell, who was one of the King's enforcers and who helped set up the downfall and killing of both Surrey and More. Holbein gives them massive jaws, with the trick of letting us see them a little from below. Since they expressed their character in physicality, an art that creates physical life can indeed characterize them vividly.

The earlier drawings of the More family are all about character, not only when the sitter was the notable author. The youngest daughter of More, Cecily Heron, is barely smiling, barely turning, and as she focuses her gaze the pupils become the focal point of the centripetal design. Her brother John's costume shows with unusual complexity how Holbein draws, with a long line that runs securely even through swaying riverine meanders, along bumpy edges of cap, cheeks, and lips. In the later drawings this assured line serves simpler, more economical work on the pink paper and suggests no longer mobility but flatness. Although the contrast between the two series is certainly involved with the technical solution to the later need for speed, no such trivial explanation tells us why it took this particular form. It needs recalling that at this moment a similar change occurred in portrait painting all over Europe, because attitudes about personality were also changing, especially in centers of power. The famous Renaissance exaltation of the individual was being undercut by the emergence of the absolutist state, pioneered by the English Tudors and the Florentine Medici, and eventually brought to a later form by the Bourbons. The great Florentine portraitist Bronzino registered this when he made the Medici less individuals than office-holding shells, with faces presented as frozen masks and with rich robes given insistent patterns. In the 1520s Michelangelo had pointed this way in his Medici tombs. When Thomas More was cut down, and Surrey's blank face was the best replacement, the world had altered, and it seems that Holbein knew this in his hands.

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The Malcolm Morley retrospective

by Hilton Kramer

There is a sense in which the contemporary retrospective exhibition—especially a retrospective devoted to the work of a living artist or of an artist only recently deceased—is almost as much of a "creation" as any of the objects it is designed to display. There is usually no question of such an exhibition being complete. Our artists tend to be too copious in production, too uneven in quality, and too repetitious in their ideas for completeness in these exhibitions to be either desirable or endurable. What is aimed for instead is a kind of saturation which can be counted on to overwhelm the spectator with an impression of energy, audacity, individuality, and—never mind the apparent contradiction—conformity to current expectations. Somehow the question of the quality of individual works seems not to enter into the equation as a paramount consideration. Beyond the inclusion of certain key works, availability is likely to be a more decisive factor than discrimination. That a painting or sculpture might need to be omitted as not up to standard is nonsense, of course, where the only applicable standard is authorship. This does not mean that judgment plays no role in the decision to organize a retrospective. It does. But it does not seem to extend beyond the decision to do the show. Once *that* decision is made, it seems to be taken for granted that the artist selected for the retrospective will have produced no failed works. The very notion of a failed painting or sculpture is now, in any case, practically obsolete, and the contemporary retrospective is one of the things that has made it so.

It often happens, therefore, that it is the retrospectives of the artists whose work we admire that turn out to be the most problematical for us. We know in advance that failures are unlikely to be excluded or even recognized; that the exhibition catalogue—a cultural artifact that looms large on these occasions—will not pause in its task of ritual celebration to acknowledge that anything has ever gone amiss in the oeuvre under discussion; and that criticism, which in principle has no vested interest in upholding the illusions fostered by these procedures, in practice is more likely than not to endorse their acceptance. The intellectual etiquette governing retrospective exhibitions has come more and more to proscribe not only skepticism but precisely the kind of discrimination they are ostensibly intended to serve.

Yet there are retrospectives that make a mockery of this convention, and the Malcolm Morley exhibition[1] that is currently

1 "Malcolm Morley: Paintings 1965-82" has already been seen at the Kunsthalle in Basel, the Museum Boymans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, and the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London. It opens this month at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington (September 9-November 6), and then travels to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (November 19-January 22) and the Brooklyn Museum in New York (February 18-April 15).

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going the rounds of the international museum circuit is one of them. Morley, let it be said straightaway, is a painter I much admire. Some of his recent pictures seemed to me on my initial encounter with them to constitute a very solid accomplishment, and seeing them again in the current retrospective has confirmed that first impression. There is no question, in my view, that he is an artist of ample gifts and remarkable ambition. At his best he is a marvelous painter. That he is also a quirky and unsteady painter, given to flights of fancy—a kind of imaginative mania—that often exceed his powers of control, has been evident for some time. But the importance of what can only be called the neurotic strain in Morley's work has never before been so fully revealed to us. In the light of the current retrospective, it can now be seen to occupy a central place in his painting, and this inevitably modifies our understanding of what he has achieved. It shows us, among much else, that he is an artist of divided—if not indeed warring—sensibilities. If this accounts for the highly dramatic aura that attaches itself to much of his recent work—as I believe it does—it may also explain something about its waywardness and willfulness. In Morley there is clearly a conflict between the "cool," classical artist he sometimes yearns to be and the "hot," romantic fantasist he more often feels compelled to be. It should not be surprising, then, that his complete successes are few, for they tend to depend on isolated episodes of resolution in the conflict which remains largely—and perhaps deliberately—unresolved in his work.

Morley was born in London in 1931. According to the "Chronology" included in the catalogue of the exhibition, "He spent a year in borstal and subsequently three years in prison [we are not told for what offense] and it was there that he developed an interest in painting, beginning a correspondence course in art." At the age of twenty-one he enrolled in the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts, painting landscapes in the tonal style of Sickert, and in 1954 he entered the Royal College of Art, where he completed his diploma in 1957. One of the events that transformed the London art scene in the Fifties was the exhibition called "Modern Art in the United States," which came to the Tate Gallery in 1956 and gave many English painters their first glimpse of the American Abstract Expressionists. It was seeing the work of these painters, we are told, that prompted Morley to visit New York in 1957. He moved here the following year, and New York has remained his principal place of residence ever since. His first solo exhibition took place at the Kornblee Gallery in New York in 1964.

The retrospective organized by Nicholas Serota, director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, begins one year later with the photo-realist paintings of ocean liners that won Morley an international reputation as a votary of the Pop Art movement, which was then in full swing. The exhibition thus omits both the landscapes and the abstract paintings that occupied Morley prior to 1965. This was probably a mistake for two reasons. Some of the finest of Morley's recent paintings have in fact been landscapes, and it might have been illuminating to have been able to compare the early landscapes with the later ones. Then there is the question of what exactly the artist owed to the Abstract Expressionist painting that prompted his move to New York. Without Morley's own abstract paintings on view, this pivotal episode in his development remains a matter of surmise.

As it is, by commencing with the photo-realist Pop paintings of the Sixties, the exhibition gives the visitor coming to Morley's work for the first time a somewhat misleading impression of his talents. Like much of Pop Art, the ocean liner paintings are based on commercial photographic images—in this case, postcards and advertisements—which are enlarged to a scale that is at once ironic, incongruous, and insouciant. Although they are painted with a studied, deadpan exquisiteness that was very stylish in the Sixties, this particular vein of foppish irony was never Morley's forte, and he soon aban-

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doned it in favor of something more robust. It is a matter of interest, of course, that these are the paintings that earned the artist his first fame. But their emotional range was clearly too narrow to accommodate the pressures that were building up in Morley to let loose with something freer and more compelling. What remains impressive in these paintings is their tonal purity—which makes one all the more curious to see in what relation they stand to the earlier pictures he is said to have painted under Sickert's influence. But in most other respects they remain enclosed in a kind of "period" style—neat, clean, elegant, detached, and somewhat lifeless.[2]

It was no easy matter, however, for Morley to move beyond this buttoned-up period style. When he did let loose, he did so with a good deal of violence and chaos. Attempting to appropriate the resources of Expressionism as a means of endowing his art with a kind of raffish vitality, Morley nonetheless tried to remain loyal to the Pop iconography, and the results were mostly a mess. Thus in the early Seventies, he turned to Rauschenberg and Johns for inspiration and to Jim Dine—the Dine of the early Sixties—for his model. This was an odd choice, for the art he now attempted to emulate consisted of combining objects—clothing, hardware, trinkets from the dime store, or anything else that came to hand—with unlovely, overloaded surfaces executed in a headlong parody of Expressionist mannerisms. It was a model already moribund when Morley turned to it—quite as if he were determined to go back to the early Sixties and start over—and there was no way even for a painter of his remarkable energy and drive to resuscitate it with success.

Still—such are the paradoxes of artistic creation—this "backward" move proved to have the desired catalytic effect for Morley's work. Starting over was pretty much what he was attempting to do in these failed paintings of the early Seventies. The truth is, though they *are* failed pictures (and thus raise legitimate questions about the place to be assigned to them in a museum retrospective), they *did* represent a new start for the artist, giving him for the first time a purchase on the kind of Expressionist fluency that he later developed into some of the most powerful pictures of the late Seventies and early Eighties—the paintings that have made him one of the stellar figures of the Neo-Expressionist movement. To accomplish this change, however, he had to perform some radical surgery on the model he was working from. All those unlovely objects had to be stripped away from the picture surface—the coil of rope and plastic bag and women's shoes attached to *Piccadilly Circus,* for example, and the straw hat and plastic rose attached to *Untitled Souvenirs, Europe* (both 1973)—and something akin to a more traditional painterly syntax re-established as a governing principle. One of the further paradoxes of Morley's development may be found in the fact that while his finest paintings—*La Plage* and *Landscape with Horses* (both 1980), *Landscape with Bullocks* (1981), and *Macaws, Bengals, with*

2 Michael Compton's essay for the exhibition catalogue is certainly no help on these or any other paintings. Even by the debased standards of the genre this essay is a travesty. Here is Compton on the ocean liner paintings: ". . . it seems to me perfectly justifiable for us to go further in associating meanings with the work than ever the artist was conscious of at the time . . . . Both the ship and the sea are classically 'women.' Morley's ships are 'cruise' ships, they offer pleasure without other purpose. The picture—the ship—is sold for pleasure, etc. Morley would not repudiate any interesting meaning or association even though, for him, the work has its own specific private meaning. That meaning is partly autobiographical, he had been a seaman on a cargo ship and had aspired to work on a grand ocean liner. He had come to America on such a ship. His ships have great names, signifying heroic and glamorous figures and places . . . . They symbolize an ordered and protected shell against the wild environment of the sea. They are going somewhere or arriving. All this, together with the ordering of sensation, is part of the available meaning." Mr. Compton, sad to say, is Keeper of Exhibitions and *Education* (my emphasis!) at the Tate Gallery.

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Mullet (1982)—owe much of their quality to the role which this more traditional syntax is allowed to play in their realization, the artist himself is so far from being at ease with it that he takes considerable pains to disrupt and subvert it in some of his most ambitious efforts. I have in mind such recent pictures as *Arizonac* (1981), *The Palms of Vai* (1982), and the wild, untitled beach painting of 1982 that looks like a nightmare version of *La Plage*. Is it yet another paradox of Morley's work that his most ambitious paintings are not always his best?

Be that as it may, since his turn toward the Expressionist mode over a decade ago Morley seems to have adopted a deliberate policy of producing two very distinct types of work —pictures that, on the one hand, are carefully integrated in design and fairly placid, even pastoral, in their imagery and, on the other, pictures that are highly disjunctive in both their imagery and their syntax. The latter, apparently, are an attempt to achieve by purely painterly means the kind of violent shifts and symbolic juxtapositions formerly accomplished by the introduction of incongruous physical objects. For this purpose Morley now draws upon a vein of archaic and primitivistic iconography that is blatantly contrasted with the purely naturalistic elements in painting. The aspiration, I suppose, is to create an art that addresses the spectator at two levels simultaneously, the mythic/symbolic and the naturalistic. This is precisely the kind of aspiration that inspired some of the greatest paintings in the Expressionist tradition—among others, the magnificent series of triptychs that were Max Beckmann's crowning achievement. (We find its literary counterpart in *The Waste Land* and a good many other modernist poems.) It is, in fact, one of the classic aspirations of high modernism, and one from which painters turned away when they lost their faith in the aesthetic efficacy of a "literary" subject matter. It tells us much about Morley's vision—as well as his ambition—that he should aspire to produce an art at this level of complexity and completeness. Yet, much as I admire certain elements in these paintings and laud the kind of aspiration they represent, I am obliged to report that his work in this mode has yet to achieve the kind of integrated vision essential to the task he has undertaken.

What these paintings nonetheless boast an abundance of is a kind of heated feeling and visceral intensity that we hardly expected to find in pictorial art in the days when it was so completely dominated by the ideals of clarity, irony, and orderly form. Morley has come a long way since those neat ocean liner paintings of the Sixties. And if he has so far shown a greater mastery over the naturalistic component of the style he now aspires to than over its mythical and fantastic elements—as I believe he does—he has nonetheless succeeded in reviving the possibility, if not yet the reality, of something far grander.

At this stage in his development Morley is clearly an artist still reaching for something he has not yet achieved, however close he seems at times to getting there and however much we are engaged by the spectacle of his unremitting assault on his objective. Which brings us back to the problem of the retrospective exhibition. Is its function fundamentally that of documentation, which allows us to follow the rises and falls in an artist's development—and thus give to his failures a place equal to that of his artistic successes? Or should it be the function of a museum retrospective to concentrate solely on achievement? The question is complicated, in Morley's case, by the artist's obvious partiality toward his own most outrageous pictures—which in my view are rarely his best pictures. One often has the impression that the real subject of the contemporary museum retrospective is the artist's career rather than his achievement, and that as spectators we are expected to bring to this subject the curiosity of the voyeur rather than the standards of the connoisseur. This is not a happy thought, but it is one that our intercourse with art is undoubtedly going to have to live with for a long time to come.

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Books

Melville as social realist

by Michael Vannoy Adams

In *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville,*[1] Michael Paul Rogin attempts to show how Melville's artistic efforts were a vehicle for expressing opinions on the political issues that preoccupied nineteenth-century America. In Rogin's view, the most important issues were capitalism, imperialism, and slavery, and the appropriate response to them at the time would have been a radical one. It is from this perspective that he judges the adequacy of Melville's politics and art. Rogin is a professor of political science at Berkeley. He has previously written on intellectuals and the phenomenon of McCarthyism and on the subjugation of the American Indian during the Jacksonian period. He now tries his hand at literary criticism as a means of writing a revisionist political history of nineteenth-century America.

There is no reason why a political scientist should not undertake such a project. It is a welcome relief from the sort of literary criticism that renounces the world, as though it did not exist, and behaves as if "texts" are all that really matter. At least Rogin recognizes that there is some kind of connection between literature and the world around us. In recent years critics as politically different as Gerald Graff and Edward Said have argued that contemporary criticism actively cultivates irrelevance precisely to the extent that it regards reality as simply one more convention, or "fiction." Rogin's book is one attempt to redress that complaint and to write criticism that just might matter to some audience larger than a circle of literary critics.

Rogin is interested in what he calls Melville's "subversive genealogy." The phrase refers to the genealogies of, in turn, Melville's family, politics in nineteenth-century America, Melville's art, and Melville's life. For Rogin's purposes, a genealogy is something like a lineage of attitudes and activities with ideological implications that subvert —or undermine and overthrow—other so-called genealogies. For example, Rogin asserts that the radical genealogy of Melville's family (one of his grandfathers took part in the Boston Tea Party, the other defeated the British at the battle of Fort Stanwix during the War of Independence) subverted the more conservative genealogy of the politics of nineteenth-century America, and that the genealogy of Melville's art eventually subverted that of his family. In the end, the genealogy of Melville's own life subverted that of his art.

Although this genealogies-contra-genealogies scheme is more than a little confusing, there is some truth to it. Unfortunately, as an organizing principle in Rogin's book the notion of subversive genealogy is little more than a gimmick. Rogin is not so much interested in what Melville's political views

1 *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* by Michael Paul Rogin. Knopf, 354 pages, $22.95

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were—they have been known for a long time now—as he is in using those views as a means to make a political statement of his own.

Rogin knows better than to claim that Melville accurately reflects the reality of the time. He acknowledges, for example, that "Melville does not create, through a set of techniques, the illusion that the fictional world described corresponds to real life." But he does maintain that Melville is a "realist" insofar as he refracts nineteenth-century American "political rhetoric," or bends it to certain ideological ends. To be a realist, as Rogin redefines the word, is to be a radical. Rogin situates Melville at the very center of the issues that dominate the time, issues that expose as a mere pretense "the ideal realm of liberal political freedom." (For Rogin liberalism is just a form of idealism.) In order to advance this argument, however, he must insist that Melville was politically conscious in a way he was not.

Melville does address the issues that most concern Rogin. For instance, in his very first novel, *Typee,* Melville states in no uncertain terms his opposition to those who, in the name of empire, presume to civilize "savage" minds and "primitive" cultures. In "The Tartarus of Maids" he shows how capital in the form of a machine exploits, alienates, and dehumanizes the girls who work in a paper mill. And in "Benito Cereno" he presents a harrowing picture of a slave revolt at sea, with razors at the throats of whites. If Rogin had concentrated exclusively on works such as these, on those in which Melville comes closest to taking a definite stand on a specific political issue, he would have written a truer and a more modest book. As it is, however, he attributes a political motive to virtually everything that Melville wrote during his life, so that almost anything is fair game. Rogin pursues Melville as a political animal just as single-mindedly as Captain Ahab hunts the white whale. He contrives a past that he can use (or manipulate) for effect and a literary hero that he can appropriate for his own ideological purposes.

Rogin's reading of *Moby-Dick* is the most egregious example of his method. According to Rogin, the crisis over slavery results in the Compromise of 1850, which culminates in the Civil War, and a decade ahead of that event Melville envisions a version of the apocalypse and writes a novel that anticipates it. Rogin quotes *The New York Herald,* which in editorializing against anti-slavery agitation compares the union to a "mighty whale struggling . . . in the terrible current of the boundless ocean, that was hurrying everything above and beneath it . . . to some final but awful catastrophe." The figure may be worthy of Melville, but it is not his. Nor does it prove anything to mention, as Rogin does, that Melville's father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, chief justice of Massachusetts, upheld the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Law. These are historical facts, interesting in themselves, but they have absolutely nothing to do with *Moby-Dick.*

As Rogin reads *Moby-Dick,* the Pequod is not so much the ship of state—as critic Alan Heimert would have it—as a galley of slaves, with Ahab the master of the plantation, as it were. Rogin contends that *Moby-Dick* is not "a symbolist text which flees history to some deeper, universal pattern" but a comment on the immediate political situation, on the Compromise that in 1850—the very year that Melville begins the novel—establishes the objective conditions that eventually conspire to produce the Civil War. Thus Rogin declares: "American freedom was originally founded on the subjugation of peoples of color. *Moby-Dick* registers the dependence of American freedom on American slavery, and the threat of American slavery to destroy American freedom."

To insist that *Moby-Dick* is about slavery in any significant sense requires, to say the least, a more active imagination than most literary critics possess. There is, in fact, no evidence in the text to sustain such a proposition. But then Rogin's is not a close reading, or even a close misreading. It is a reading not even remotely respectful of what Melville evidently intended to convey. For Rogin, the text is only a pretext for a po-

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lemic. It is merely a means to an end, a convenient excuse to coerce Melville into conformity with what Rogin wishes were the case.[2]

Moby-Dick is in fact a symbolist text with a universal pattern (as well as a historical dimension) to it. The structure of the plot is conspicuously archetypal. In *Moby-Dick,* Melville imagines a nineteenth-century American version of the quest motif. The object is to chase, catch, and kill a white whale. Ahab projects a meaning onto the white whale, and so do literary critics like Rogin. But for Melville what the white whale means is a confusion of possibilities. From *Moby-Dick* to the end of his life, Melville was a writer increasingly interested in what he called, eighty years before William Empson, "the ambiguities" (the subtitle of *Pierre*). As he developed as a writer (and as a thinker), he began to regard reality as a construct that needs deconstructing, a value that needs transvaluing. He does not furnish facile answers, he does not deliver a definite political message—he poses questions that relativize what other more complacent and less inquisitive minds call reality.

The purpose of Melville's symbolism is, to borrow a phrase from Paul Ricoeur, "to disclose the multiplicity of meaning out of the ambiguity of being." For a person as politically committed as Rogin evidently is, such an attitude is bound to be perplexing. It confuses all issues, undermines—"subverts"— all assumptions *and* conclusions. It is perhaps for this reason that Rogin is ill at ease with Melville's later works, notably *Pierre* and *The Confidence-Man,* which he labels "formalist" or "self-referential" and regards as a regrettable retreat from the real world and into a fiction that is not "socially realistic." Rogin asserts that, as a genre, the novel is "unified by whole characters" who are "attached to ordinary life." But this is not a definition of the novel; it is simply the expression of a preference on Rogin's part for a certain *kind* of novel. And the more Melville departs from that model, the more uncomfortable Rogin becomes with his fiction.

For example, Rogin tends to reduce *Pierre* to a *roman à clef* in which the characters are thinly veiled caricatures of members of Melville's own family, and the plot a more or less unconscious display on Melville's part of incestuous and parricidal impulses toward his mother and father. In Rogin's terms, Melville, in *Pierre,* is undermining and overthrowing the genealogy of his own family and the class to which they originally belonged or had pretensions to belonging.

Melville does in fact deal with incest and parricide in *Pierre,* but he does so explicitly (he calls them "the two most horrible crimes... possible to civilized humanity") and, as his subtitle indicates, ambiguously. He may also be alluding to members of his own family. But even if he is, the novel does not have a merely personal and private meaning; it is not just an inside joke. *Pierre* is a satire on the sentimentalism of the nineteenth-century domestic novel. Melville shows just how ambiguous certain moral and metaphysical assumptions become when anyone takes them seriously and tries to apply them to the letter. Pierre naïvely believes that if he imitates Christ, he will attain a state of perfect virtue. In the end he manages only to parody Oedipus. Thus Melville demonstrates that the very best of intentions may have the worst imaginable consequences.

2 In *Mardi,* Melville does directly confront the double standard that divides the union. Different characters express different opinions on slavery. In the end, one character summarizes the controversy and describes the issue as a real dilemma, perhaps an irreconcilable one: "'Tears are not swords; and wrongs seem almost natural as rights. For the righteous to suppress an evil, is sometimes harder than for others to uphold it. Humanity cries out against this vast enormity:—not one man knows a prudent remedy.'" This may or may not be the voice of Melville, but at the very least Melville does allow this character to have the last, indecisive word on the subject, and the statement he makes can by no means be construed as ideologically consistent with Rogin's idea of an appropriately radical political position.

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Rogin also reads *The Confidence-Man* as an exercise in genealogical subversion. He asserts that the "ur-story" on which Melville based the novel was the bankruptcy of his father. Citing a number of business letters in which Melville's father employs the expressions "confidence" and "confidential," Rogin dubs him the model for the confidence men in Melville's novel. Although these letters reveal that Melville's father could be a less-than-ethical businessman, to suggest that they inspired Melville to write *The Confidence-Man* is to indulge a conceit that no amount of this kind of documentation will support. But Rogin is so bound and determined to read the novel as an indictment of capitalism (all businessmen are by their very nature con men) that he inadvertently demonstrates how a literary critic can be a con man, too, even if the only man he manages to con is himself. There are petty capitalists aplenty in *The Confidence-Man.* They abound aboard the ship of fools that serves Melville as a scene for the action that takes place, significantly, on All Fools' Day. To the gullible they offer bargains in fraudulent stocks, patent medicines, and various machines, including the "Protean Easy-chair," the "Samaritan Pain Dissuader," and the "Omni-Balsamic Reinvigorator." But the novel has a much larger subject than business-as-usual in nineteenth-century America. "Confidence" means, literally, "with faith," and with that in mind Melville sets out to expose the ambiguities of blind faith and bad faith in general. He implies that life is a swindle, that only the skeptic or cynic has a chance to survive. It is a con-or-be-conned, a trust-and-be-tricked world, and what one of Melville's con men calls the "Wall Street spirit" is just the most recent variation on the universal theme.

Rogin goes further astray when he implicitly accepts the decline-into-oblivion school of criticism that depicts Melville in the aftermath of *Moby-Dick* as a writer who gradually withdrew from reality. The difficulty that Melville encountered in later years in finding a publisher (much less an audience) for the kind of fiction he most wanted to write did isolate him. But it is also true that even before he wrote *Moby-Dick* he had reconciled himself to that prospect. "So far as I am individually concerned, & independent of my pocket," he had said, "it is my earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to 'fail.'" After a certain point in his life, socially realistic novels simply did not interest Melville, "succeed" as they might in the marketplace. Rogin is incapable of appreciating this indifference as a real choice, a positive one, on Melville's part. Instead, he sees Melville as ultimately a victim of circumstance, of historical and political forces, of a genealogy that subverted him and caused him to turn defensively inward, away from the world, toward the text itself.

When Tocqueville imagines what a democratic American literature might be like and says that he is "alarmed at the thought of too many immense, incoherent images, overdrawn descriptions, bizarre effects, and a whole fantastic breed of brainchildren who will make one long for the real world," he could be reviewing any number of Melville's works, including *Moby-Dick, Pierre,* and especially *The Confidence-Man.* Insofar as Rogin shares Tocqueville's preference for a literature of the real world, for whole characters and ordinary life, he is simply unequipped to comment in a meaningful way on many of Melville's most important works, which from a twentieth-century vantage point look very much like experiments in post-modernist fiction. Insofar as Rogin espouses an art-for-the-sake-of-politics position and tries to implicate Melville in that attitude, he seriously misrepresents what Melville was really doing as a writer and thinker. In the end, Melville's most ambitious works are too complex and profound, too difficult and indeterminate, to accommodate the narrow political and aesthetic categories that Rogin tries to impose upon them.

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Semiotics and murder

Umberto Eco The Name of the Rose. Translated from the Italian by William Weaver. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 502 pages, $15.95

reviewed by Barry Schwabsky

Although *The Name of the Rose* is Umberto Eco's first novel, his name is far from unfamiliar. Eco is a professor of semiotics at the University of Bologna and the author of several important works in the fields of cultural history, aesthetics, and the theory of signs. He has taught in American universities as well, and two of his books (*A Theory of Semiotics* and *The Role of the Reader*) have been published here. Although Eco's *Opera aperta* (1962) is considered one of the theoretical bases for the work of the aggressively experimental Italian writers who gained notoriety in the early Sixties under the rubric "Gruppo '63," he himself has produced an entirely different kind of fiction: a "good read" (there is such a genre). *The Name of the Rose* is Italy's most popular novel since Lampedusa's *Leopard,* the success of which was such an irritant to Eco and the avant-gardists of 1963. Not surprisingly, Eco's novel has been received in some circles as a kind of betrayal. One of his colleagues lamented recently that "Barthes and Jakobson are dead, Kristeva has turned into a psychoanalyst and Eco into a novelist," as though all these desertions from the field of semiotic inquiry were equally definitive.

Eco claims not to have consciously aimed at conquering a popular audience: "If it's true that the public was looking for theological discussions, Benedictine monks, just ten pages of love out of five hundred, and lots of Latin, then it's true I showed an extremely keen sense of public taste." But there is something disingenuous about this. Since the days of the Russian formalists, literary semiotics has been above all the theory of the *device.* It assumes that it is possible to view literature scientifically by reducing it to a set of techniques used for producing certain effects. It was, after all, Eco who wrote, in *Il Superuomo di massa,* that "whatever the critical disposition with which one goes to see *Love Story,* it would take a heart of stone to remain unaffected and refrain from crying . . . . And this is so for a very simple reason: films of this sort are built to make you cry. And therefore they do so. You can't eat a candy and claim, on the grounds of your vast culture and strong control over your own sensations, to have tasted salt. Chemistry never fails." *The Name of the Rose,* too, is capable of drawing a strong emotional response, though of a different order of complexity from that of *Love Story.* Even those theological discussions and dollops of Latin (suitably reduced for the American audience) are not necessarily alien to popular taste, which loves nothing better than to be educated, or to feel that it is being educated. But this still does not account entirely for the special appeal of this novel. *The Name of the Rose* works on several levels at once.

The protagonist is William of Baskerville, a learned Franciscan, former inquisitor, student of Roger Bacon, and friend of William of Ockham. The year is 1327. William has been sent on an important mission by the Holy Roman Emperor (Louis of Bavaria), a mission which leads him to an unnamed Benedictine abbey in northern Italy, where the main action of the novel takes place.

William has been sent to arrange a meeting between a group of Franciscan theologians supported by the Emperor and representatives of Pope John XXII. Their differences center on Church doctrine and worldly politics. Five years earlier the Franciscans had affirmed the doctrine of the absolute poverty of Christ, but this doctrine is anathema to the Pope since it appears to lead to the doctrine of the poverty of the Church and to the conclusion that the Church should have no power in secular affairs. Now the Pope has demanded the presence of the Franciscans' leader, Michael of Cesena, at the Papal court at Avignon. It is feared that the Pope intends to trap Michael with charges of heresy, or pressure him to recant through the threat of such charges. This meeting,

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then, is intended to set conditions for the later meeting at Avignon. William's mission is to win permission for an imperial legation to accompany Michael to Avignon.

The abbey in which these forces play out their conflict is in many ways a relic of an earlier world. It is wealthy and learned at a time when the power and prestige of monasteries has waned along with the feudal economy that supported them, a time when urban merchant capital has become increasingly important and the universities have established themselves as the true centers of learning. William explains to his companion, Adso:

> Money, in Italy, has a different function from what it has in your country, or in mine. Money circulates everywhere, but much of life elsewhere is still dominated and regulated by the bartering of goods . . . and money serves only to procure these goods. In the Italian city, on the contrary, you must have noticed that goods serve to procure money. And even priests, bishops, even religious orders have to take money into account. That is why, naturally, rebellion against power takes the form of a call to poverty.

Representative of the abbey's uncertain position is the abbot. He is unsympathetic to radical demands for the poverty of the Church, but nevertheless finds himself on the side of the Emperor against the Pope along with the Franciscans. He sees his support of them as one way of opposing the decline of monastic life and the growth of the secular clergy. And among his monks are a number of former "spiritual" Franciscans, radicals who in attempting to hold the order to the purity of its origins have come close to committing heresy. He has taken them into the Benedictine order to shield them from persecution.

But these are not the only problems on the abbot's mind as he welcomes William and Adso. Just days before, a young monk was found dead under mysterious circumstances. It seems to be a case of either murder or suicide, possibly linked to sexual activity within the monastery. Knowing of William's experience as an inquisitor, the abbot asks him to conduct a discreet investigation. William is given complete freedom of the abbey—with one exception: the abbey's library, which is at all times forbidden to everyone except the abbot and the librarian himself. Unfortunately, the young monk probably died as the result of a fall or push from one of the library windows. Thus, another element is added to the mystery: How did the young monk come to be in the library?

William has barely begun his investigation when foul play claims the life of yet another monk. And this is not to be the last of the crimes within the abbey. William does not discover the truth about them until too late, however, and he is unable to prevent the Pope's men from using the crimes (by connecting them—falsely—with the heretical pasts of the former "spirituals" in the abbey) to disrupt the Emperor's plan and force Michael into going unprotected to Avignon.

William turns out to be a failure, then, but he is portrayed in the novel as a kind of hero. This is possible because *The Name of the Rose* is more than just a murder mystery. It is also a moral tale in which the discussion of events is as important as the events themselves. The clues in the mystery are like signs subject to various interpretations, and as the interpretations struggle against one another, the novel becomes an apology for the values William embodies. His first tenet is the priority of method over doctrine; like Charles Peirce, one of the most important sources for Eco's semiotics, William is a pragmatist. Thus he is at odds with the theologians of Paris, who reason from first principles, and with the inquisitors, whose profession he was unable to stomach. Adso asks:

> "In Paris do they always have the true answer?"
>
> "Never," William said, "but they are always very sure of their errors."

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> "And you," I said with childish impertinence, "never commit errors?"
>
> "Often," he answered. "But instead of conceiving only one, I imagine many, so I become the slave of none."

William is a lucid interpreter of signs, but his method is based on an anti-dogmatic pluralism. He assumes not that there is a unique order to the world, but that there are various connections from which some provisory conclusions may be drawn. In his *Theory of Semiotics* Eco has written that "the interpreter of a text is at the same time obliged both to challenge the existing codes and to advance interpretive hypotheses that work as a more comprehensive, tentative and prospective form of codification." The notion that the interpretation which is more comprehensive is also more tentative lies at the heart of William's method—and the novel's higher meaning.

At the moral and political level William's methodological openness and pluralism correspond to a spirit of tolerance and skepticism which is nevertheless pessimistic about the possibility of achieving a just social order. Any ordered social entity, William reasons, has a center and a periphery, and this produces an antagonism which is mutually corrupting.

> Saint Francis realized this, and his first decision was to go out and live among the lepers. The people of God cannot be changed until the outcasts are restored to its body . . . . Francis didn't succeed, and I say it with great bitterness. To recover the outcasts he had to act within the church, to act within the church he had to obtain the recognition of his rule, from which an order would emerge, and this order, as it emerged, would recompose the image of a circle, at whose margin the outcasts would remain.

The outcasts, the "lepers," are always ripe for heretical movements. But what matters in their heresies is not the doctrinal content for which the Church condemns them; the marginal are ready to hear any doctrine as long as it promises that those at the center, the privileged, the powerful, will be punished. Therefore, "every battle against heresy wants only this: to keep the leper as he is." William denies that the heresies have any progressive impetus; they merely exacerbate the division they seek to overcome, but at the same time he affirms the reactionary and hypocritical nature of the effort to put them down. He has no solution of his own to offer, but he does possess a lucid awareness of the problem and of the fact that no solution offers itself yet. Certainly he is aware that his own vague faith in science and democracy does not suffice. William's attitude is a compound of pessimism and hope, skepticism and perseverance. It is the kind of attitude that makes it possible to survive historic disappointments without cynicism.

This, I think, is one reason why *The Name of the Rose* has achieved a vast success in Italy, and elsewhere in Europe, where a broadly based Left is experiencing confusion and uncertainty. Established parties like the PCI have stalemated themselves in their search for a "third way" between the tepid reformism of the social democrats and Soviet-style Communism. Meanwhile, the hopes raised by the radical movements of the late Sixties and early Seventies have withered away as those movements have subsided into invisibility or random violence. One might risk a certain vulgar allegorization to make the parallel explicit: the Franciscans represent the Left, divided between reformists and those who wish to maintain a revolutionary stance even within the parliamentary system (in the novel's terms, the Church); the heretics are the extra-parliamentary radicals, the revolutionary sects that spawned the Red Brigade. The confession of one of the abbey's hidden heretics as he faces the Inquisition rivals the modern-day rhetoric of terrorism for arrogance and desperation:

> And we burned and looted because we had proclaimed poverty the universal law, and we had the right to appropriate the illegitimate riches of others, and we wanted to strike at

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> the heart of the network of greed that extended from parish to parish, but we never looted in order to possess, or killed in order to loot; we killed to punish, to purify the impure through blood . . . . We had to kill the innocent as well, in order to kill all of you more quickly. We wanted a better world, of peace and sweetness and happiness for all, we wanted to kill the war that you brought with your greed . . . .

The Name of the Rose does not resonate with our own recent past in quite this way. For an American audience the novel remains above all a middlebrow entertainment, though one so well wrought that the novel has made its way to the bestseller lists here, too. Eco's prose may not match Calvino's for musical richness or emotional depth, but at its center is a wryness of tone that is quite engaging. If his characters are not especially complicated, that is really beside the point; they embody various narrative and thematic functions. And in some cases these combine in ways complex enough to impart a special intensity of aspect that raises *The Name of the Rose* above the intellectual limitations of the common "good read."

As an exercise in structure *The Name of the Rose* is truly masterful, imposing on its readers the same complexity of interpretations—the same dilemmas and choices—that are William's great concern. Early in the book, for example, a blind, elderly monk, Jorge of Burgos, denounces the fantastic, grotesque images so common in Medieval art. In so doing, he repeats nearly verbatim a famous diatribe of Saint Bernard against the art of his time. Adso gives his reaction: "I admired the vivid memory thanks to which, blind perhaps for many years, he could still recall the images whose wickedness he descried. I was led to suspect they had greatly seduced him when he had seen them, since he could yet describe them with such passion." Adso's perception is very astute, and indeed very modern-seeming: a product more typical of a post-Freudian sensibility, one might say, than of a Medieval mind. In fact, it *is* a modern perception: it is Meyer Schapiro's reaction, in his essay "On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art," to precisely that letter of Bernard's from which Jorge's words are taken. Schapiro wrote there:

> We are impressed by the fact that although Bernard condemns these works as meaningless and wasteful, he has written so vivid an inventory of their subjects and characterized them with such precision . . . . The saint has perused these capitals no less attentively than the monks whom he reproaches for meditating the sculptures rather than the Bible or the Fathers. Only a mind deeply drawn to such things could recall them so fully . . . .

A little further thought, however, calls Adso's interpretation of Jorge (but not Schapiro's of Bernard) into question, for unlike Adso, Jorge is conscious of the fact that he is citing a text: thus, for all we know Jorge does not remember those profane images at all, but only Bernard's attack on them. In just such ways, *The Name of the Rose* demands that we question interpretations, and settle for something less than definitive answers.

The Romantic agony

Lorenz Eitner Géricault: His Life and Work. Cornell University Press, 375 pages, $75

reviewed by Anita Brookner

"I have tried to bring together . . . what is now known about Géricault, dealing with his life and work in one continuous narrative, and putting the emphasis strongly on his artistic development . . . . Tracing the general line of his development and reconstructing the evolution of his main projects, I have searched the evidence of his artistic practice for clues to his habit of mind, his methods of work, and, ultimately, to his personality of which the written sources tell us so little." The exemplary clarity, the *bon ton,* of Lorenz Eitner's book on Géricault—its decorum fastidiously distant from the

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disingenuous and space-filling jargon that disfigures much modern art-historical scholarship—echo those of his urbane predecessor, Charles Clément, who wrote the first scholarly biography of Géricault in 1867. To read Clément is as steadying an experience as taking a restorative sojourn beside his native Lac Léman. To read Eitner is to feel the same reassurance, the same gravity, as if one were in the hands of a good doctor, and in view of Géricault's morbid propensities this is by no means inappropriate. Yet there remains, hovering in the air over both their books, and over their subject, and indeed over Géricault's terrible life, that startling and uncensored admission with which Clément opened his monograph: "C'est en tremblant que j'ai commencé cette étude."

What made Clément tremble was the knowledge, which he kept secret, but which is now revealed, of Géricault's love affair with his aunt Alexandrine-Modeste Caruel de Saint-Martin and the birth of their son, facts discovered almost by accident in 1976. But Clément may also have had knowledge of the insanity in Géricault's family and of his subject's own uneven and unnerving mental climate. There may have been one or more psychotic episodes; there was certainly an impulse to self-destruction. Much of this still remains unclear, and it is probable that Géricault's close-knit and relatively powerful family succeeded in suppressing much more evidence than was known even to Clément. But in a sense that evidence is supernumerary beside the evidence of the pictures themselves.

To the most unprejudiced spectator there begins to be something sinister and disturbing about the simplest of Géricault's pictorial undertakings. Here is a portrait of a child, Alfred Dedreux, aged five. With hair curled and an extremely adult expression on his face, he is cast adrift in a barren and undomesticated landscape, posing in an oddly seductive manner in tiny clothes of tarpaulin weight and thickness. Here are two veterans of the Napoleonic campaigns; they wear the brave moustaches made popular by that élite and the great gauntlets and the heavy breastplates; but they are young men grown horribly old, and around their sleeves and collars there winds a wavering line of pigment with a curious life of its own, like automatic writing. The effect is to implant a feeling of disquiet in the onlooker, as if some wordless, or indeed unpaintable, doubt had surfaced from the tight-lipped soldiers' experience. A trumpeter of hussars, in his gorgeous scarlet uniform, wields not only his trumpet, but a dispatch case and a huge unsheathed sword; yet the wide-angled perspective shows him backed into a corner and the brim of his plumed helmet casts a black shadow over his peevish face. In tiny drawings, hurried and intense copulations take place; slower and more voluptuous encounters must be shrouded by nightfall. Torture is hinted at, and corruption, and anxiety. On the raft of the *Medusa,* splendidly muscled nudes, untouched by emaciation or dehydration, toil under the equatorial sun as if they were the victims of some hypothetical mining disaster, inspiring one nervous critic to inquire, "Are they Greeks or Romans? Turks or Frenchmen? Under what skies do they navigate?"

To the amateur of painting who knows nothing of Géricault's story but who is obliged to read the signs of his artistic personality solely through the images he chooses to paint and the way in which he chooses to paint them, two impressions are abundantly evident, and these two impressions may furnish the key to his most important and enduring characteristics as an artist. From the first he appears to be an entirely instinctive painter, entirely unsupported by theory, and this alone would make him remarkable at a time when painting was still officially under the Davidian aegis. Yet, more than this, at times Géricault's style is even unsupported by choice of specific subject, an absence of which he was despairingly aware. Géricault's inability to find suitable subjects is extremely intriguing, and it can be noted that even when he thinks he has found one he leaves half of it out, so that we are presented with what amounts to a gallery of effects without causes. Why is this officer

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leaving the battlefield? He is not being pursued, and all is suspiciously quiet around him. What is the particular reproach being leveled against us by all those ornamental but costive hussars? What crime or indignity does that awful child, Louise Vernet, meditate as she clasps a huge cat tightly in her arms? What is the tragedy of the white horse, with his flaring nostrils and abraded muzzle? Why does the spectator feel doomed to clamber onto the raft of the *Medusa* and to strain for a sight of the brig *Argus,* when the whole affair has nothing to do with him? And those victims of obsession, those monomaniacs, with their oblique glances at someone who is not there, under what skies do they navigate? If the spectator of the present day is disconcerted, a thought may be spared for the Salon visitor, and, more, the artistic bureaucracy of the second decade of the nineteenth century, forced to recognize the vast talent, and the total unaccountability, of this embodiment of what was much later to be called the Romantic agony.

Of the vast talent there was no doubt. An ability to manipulate material, and indeed to nail down the materiality of his gloomy and threatening world, came to Géricault without benefit of teaching; it even came in the teeth of the orthodox teaching of his worldly and superficial masters, Vernet and Guérin. And the sheer grossness of Géricault's love of matter adds excitement and singularity to everything he touches. A gold glove clasping a steel sword, or a pair of crimson epaulettes swelling to carpet thickness, jolt the spectator into a recognition of this artist's extraordinary power. We are in the presence of someone who knows more than we do, who knows more than he should. This knowingness, which impelled him to manipulate a reclining female figure based on Michelangelo's *Night* into an orgasmic woman groaning under the attentions of an arching male (*Jupiter and Antiope,* according to the Rouen catalogue), deserves more than a little attention; not only does the style of this rough carving (and there may be more) leap over a few decades to prefigure the styles of

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late Carpeaux or early Dalou, but the subject matter spills forth the raw truth of a situation to which not one of his contemporaries could allude unless it were dressed up as Paris and Helen, Telemachus and Eucharis, Cephalus and Aurora, Pygmalion and Galatea, or Sappho and Phaon, and wearing the obligatory moral and physical fig leaves of helmets, tunics, and antique curls. Although these exercises, usually in the form of drawings, or *ébauches,* were never meant for public contemplation, Géricault, in dashing them down or chiseling them out, had no idea how disconcerting he was or would appear to the tired and circumspect members of his official entourage.

The second characteristic to be noted by the unprejudiced viewer is that although the subject may have a decipherable connection with objective reality, the varying states of the painter's consciousness not only alter the rate of his execution but even his perception of bodily proportions. There is no apparent explanation for the speed with which he dashed off his first masterpiece, the *Charging Chasseur*—twelve days—and the heaviness that weighs down the sagging silent figure of the *Wounded Cuirassier*; or for the rapidity and concentration of the portraits of the insane—no underdrawing, no retouches, no pentiments—and the cotton-wool opacity of his view of the children Alfred Dedreux, Louise Vernet, Louis Bro, as if his vision of them were impeded by a drastically lowered receptivity, which in turn affects his handling and makes it thick, turbid, verging on paralysis. By the same token, there is no stability in his view of the world: men and horses, his most abiding obsession and his most durable theme, exchange their proportions from time to time. Horses, usually full of fire and fight, become, at the end of his life, so powerless and so tiny that they cannot even pull a farm cart through the opening of a cottage-sized building. The Brooklyn sketch for the *Wounded Cuirassier* shows a man defeated by the weight of his coat; the *Trumpeter of the Chasseurs,* in the Niarchos collection, is dwarfed by the size of his trousers. In all of these works, implications of tragedy are present, and they are extremely worrying, not least because there seems to be little reason for them to be present in such force and because there is such an exaggerated *décalage* between ostensible subject and immanent but untranslatable significance.

Yet it was not meant to be so, and when all the factors have been reviewed it must be argued that the perpetual sabotage which Géricault invested in his own life was the result less of his unorthodox love affair than of the intermittent workings of what must be seen as dementia, alternately aiding and impeding a genius so unpredictable that none like it had been seen before in France and none like it was to be seen afterward. With the terrible example of Géricault's candor before him, Delacroix assumed a lifelong reticence. The ardor of Géricault makes Courbet look flabby and verbose. Yet this extraordinary man's life was set in genteel and decorous circumstances; he was rich, he was cherished by his friends, and even after the birth of his child he continued to live in his father's house. His curious paintings disrupted the entire platform on which late Neo-Classical and Napoleonic painting was predicated, but all he wanted to do was to follow the examples of David and Gros, whom he greatly admired. He made the Italian journey, although at his own expense, and he sent *The Raft of the Medusa* to the politically sensitive Salon of 1819, where it not unexpectedly made a number of people rather irritable. In nearly every respect he made great efforts to paint in an entirely conventional manner, filling a notebook with careful outline drawings inspired by Flaxman's engravings, planning the symbolic masterpiece to be brought home from Italy, sending a modern history subject in the manner of Gros to the Salon, and even going to England, that most prestigious and up-to-date of countries, to learn the latest trends.

But in fact some native waywardness interfered with all of these commendable activities. Those outlines in the Zoubaloff sketchbook (which Eitner dates around

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1815, that is, later than Clément) clearly contain far more drama and piquancy than Flaxman ever intended that they should. Italy confirmed Géricault's suspicion that he could turn any artist's conceits into something else without satisfying his own pictorial hunger; while the great intended masterpiece, the *Race of the Riderless Horses,* with its reminiscences of the Elgin marbles, and the giant thirty-foot canvas on which it was to be brushed, simply petered out. *The Raft of the Medusa* is the one instance of a carefully chosen subject carefully carried through; its effect is overwhelming, and, to some viewers, dreadful. On the way to its completion, Géricault found it helpful to fill his studio with unusual reminders of mortality—not casts, but guillotined heads or severed arms and legs brought back from the dissecting room of a nearby hospital, and these fragments, which he painted most beautifully, signal forth a stronger sense of identification than do those heroic nudes on the raft. And that visit to England, undertaken for commercial and no doubt therapeutic reasons, turned into a lingering experience of novelties, not all of them agreeable: Wilkie and Constable, certainly, but also the horrific world of the London poor, of which we get the first glimpse in Géricault's magnificent lithographs, before the novels of Dickens. And the portraits of the insane, which Eitner dates to 1822-23 (thus dismissing Mme Aimé-Azam's theory that they may have resulted from Géricault's confinement in a private clinic owing to a breakdown after the great effort of the *Medusa*), how is one to place these in any orthodox history of art? They reveal too much and explain too little, and they defeat everyone who comes near them.

In his last years Géricault took on something of the saint and martyr in his aspect, dying visibly of horrible and perhaps self-inflicted wounds, generous to the young, inspiring great devotion in his friends, speaking of pictures to be painted on immense surfaces with huge brushes, working out themes on the abolition of the slave trade or the opening of the doors of the Spanish Inquisition, that is, current or recent concerns, yet too weak to do more than make a drawing of his powerful left hand. On the cast that was made of this hand he wrote, "A tous ceux que j'aime. Adieu." He died, a shriveled old man, aged thirty-two.

Clearly, to write such a life, and to account for such pictures, demands unusual qualities. These Mr. Eitner has in abundance. Together with his ability to sustain this troubled and troubling narrative he has the gift of finding the quietly memorable turn of phrase: of Carle Vernet, he says, "he made himself conspicuous as the interpreter of a modern—which is to say English and middle-class—ideal of beauty"; of *The Raft of the Medusa,* "the few inches of canvas which separate the signaling men from the speck which signifies the *Argus* demand to be read as miles." He speaks of "the blustering grognards of Vernet and Charlet," of "sharp unsteady illumination," of a "hard, terse, economical" touch. There is also a sort of natural piety in the book, which is as agreeable as it is refreshing. This is a fine and scholarly task, scrupulously carried out, an example to the self-assured, and a pleasure to readers at every stage of instruction.

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Letters

Fairfield Porter

To the Editors:

Only just now did I see Hilton Kramer's piece on Fairfield Porter in your May number. Mr. Kramer quotes a paragraph from an interview the artist gave Paul Cummings that was published in the *Archives of American Art*. Every reference made to me in that interview contains errors of fact or is wholly fictitious in substance.

Porter did not introduce me to de Kooning, whom I'd met several years before I ever set eyes on Porter. We were never in de Kooning's presence together. Fairfield and I did see one another often, but far from "regularly," in 1942, not at all before that, and hardly at all afterwards. We seldom argued, we seldom disagreed. Once, in the summer of 1942, we painted together.

This trivia to show Fairfield's relation to the truth. What isn't trivial, at least for me, is his having me tell de Kooning (no acolyte of the truth either), "You can't paint figuratively today." That's dreamt up. You don't talk that way to art or to artists.

Porter was a bit "touched"; I have to come out and say that. There was something wrong with him, and not only in relation to the truth. I admired his art, but by the time he started showing I'd acquired a distaste for his person that kept me from writing or even talking about anything that had to do with him. (There was one other instance in which I let my reaction to a person—mistaken this time—whose art I admired shut me up. That was with Rothko, whose hysterical moments I couldn't see through or into.)

All the same: that Porter was by way of being icky, and that he was an inveterate prevaricator, and that he could be dishonest in his art criticism—all this takes nothing away from his art in itself. Painting along with him, I felt envy.

Clement Greenberg
Norwich, New York

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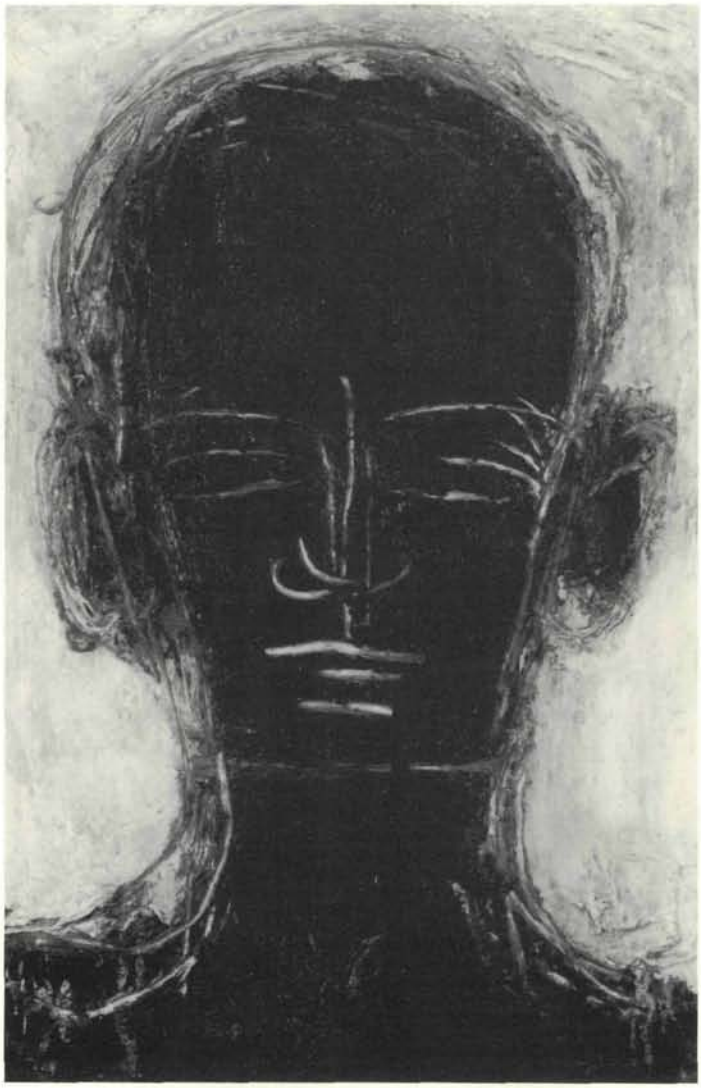

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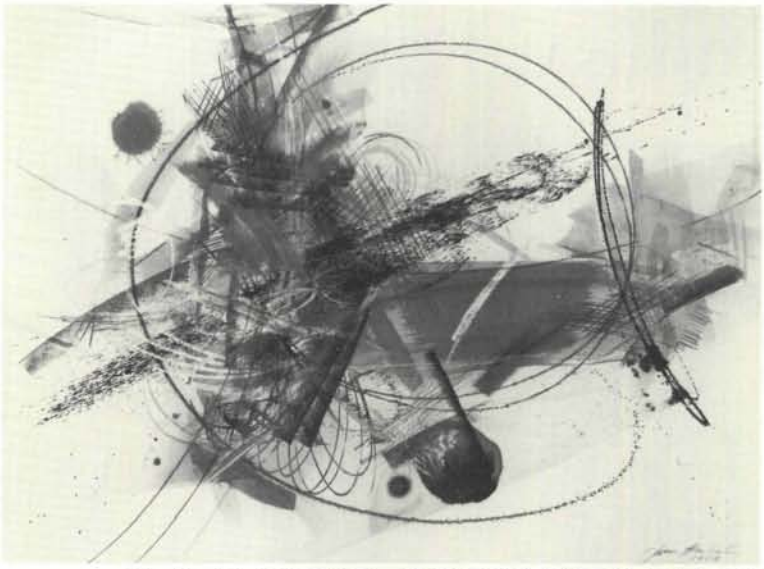

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